Commentary
May 2004

The Oil-for-Food Scam: What Did Kofi Annan Know, and When Did He Know It?

Claudia Rosett

Jews, Christians, and "The Passion"

David Berger

The Richard Clarke Show

Joshua Muravchik

What Kind of Religion Is Islam?

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Jihad in Jakarta

Joshua Kurlantzick

Milton Avery's Art, and Ours

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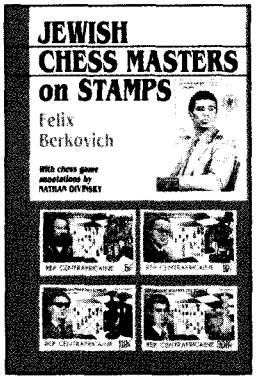

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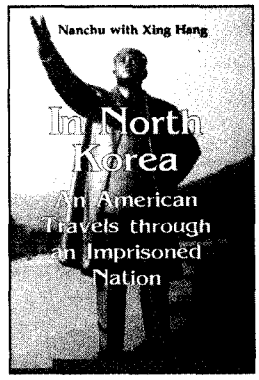

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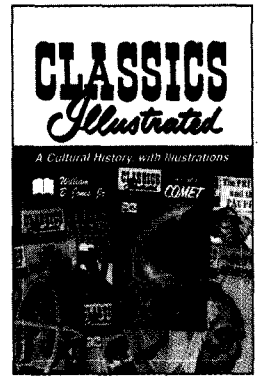

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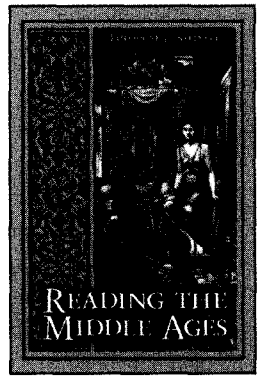

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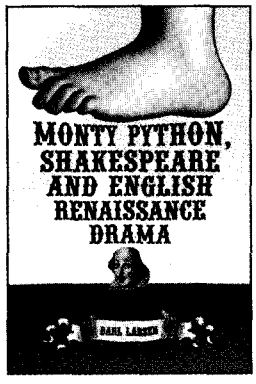

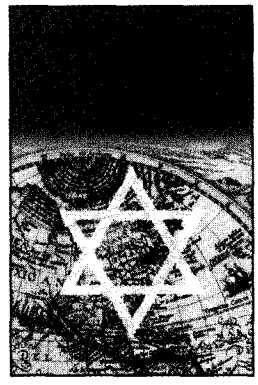

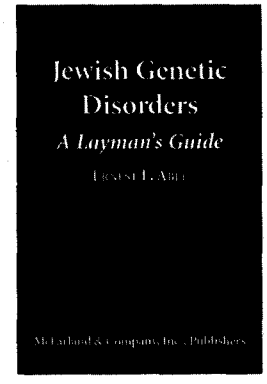

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ARTICLES

15

The Oil-for-Food Scam: What Did Kofi Annan Know, and When Did He Know It? *Claudia Rosett*
Charged with bringing relief to the people of Iraq, the United Nations instead bolstered Saddam's tyranny and thoroughly corrupted itself.

23

Jews, Christians, and "The Passion" *David Berger*
Mel Gibson's movie has sharpened old divisions, created new ones, and endangered decades of effort to build good will.

32

The Richard Clarke Show *Joshua Muravchik*
To enliven the political season, a best-selling book accuses George W. Bush of being soft on terrorism.

42

What Kind of Religion Is Islam? *Alain Besançon*
Despite wishful thinking by ecumenicist outsiders, the third "religion of the Book" is utterly unlike Christianity and Judaism.

49

Jihad in Jakarta *Joshua Kurlantzick*
Even in relatively tolerant Indonesia, the radicals are making steady and worrisome progress.

ART

53

Milton Avery's Art, and Ours *Steven C. Munson*
An exhibit by a 20th-century American master reflects a very different impulse from today's need to irritate.

MUSIC

57

Composers for Communism *Terry Teachout*
The careers of Aaron Copland and Dmitri Shostakovich intersect both musically and in relation to a third man: Joseph Stalin.

LETTERS

3
North Korea; Bush's conservatism; watching the UN.

BOOKS

63 Who Are We? by Samuel P. Huntington *James Nuechterlein*

65 A Secret Life by Benjamin Weiser *Richard Pipes*

66 The Way to Paradise by Mario Vargas Llosa *Roger Kaplan*

71 The Working Poor by David K. Shipler *Leslie Lenkowsky*

73 Surprise, Security, and the American Experience by John Lewis Gaddis *Max Boot*

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Letters from Readers

North Korea

To the Editor:

Arthur Waldron thinks the U.S. has erred in seeing China as the key to the North Korean situation ["Our Game with North Korea," February]. For one thing, he believes China does not really have the ability to bring Kim Jong Il to heel.

But what supports this notion? The Koreans may resent the idea of being China's vassal, but this does not change the fact that their country is just that. Should China turn its back on Pyongyang, North Korea would be devastated, not least psychologically, and Kim would know that he was lost.

Mr. Waldron correctly senses, however, that China is not as afraid of a nuclear North Korea as once presumed. Moreover, it has reasons to deem the prickly situation to its advantage. But the answer, surely, is to change China's mind, and to persuade it that a North Korea armed with long-range nuclear missiles would result in a remilitarized and nuclear Japan. Making China the solution to the North Korean imbroglio is not an error. The mistake lies in not pushing China aggressively enough.

Marc Salzberger
Middle Village, New York

To the Editor:

Arthur Waldron does well to point out that, in the end, what drives the leaders of both Koreas is the goal of unification. No matter what positions our South Korean allies take, they will always aim toward uniting with the North Koreans. This must be considered a given.

The political and diplomatic quagmire that we now face vis-à-vis North Korea could have been avoided. Mr. Waldron rightly places some blame on the Clinton administration's capitulation in the mid-90's to North Korea's demands for economic aid in return for promises to end its nuclear programs. It is certainly true that this kind of diplomacy by itself did not resolve the matter.

But the real source of the problem is the overall trajectory of American policy toward North Korea, which has been inconsistent at best and often indifferent and ignorant. The Clinton administration's gradual diplomacy would have worked had the U.S. stayed the course and kept communicating with the North Koreans. This would have represented not a capitulation but an acknowledgement of the fact that a hostile regime can always be dealt with constructively.

Nor should we forget that there was no clear policy or coherent thinking about the Koreas within the Bush administration for well over a year after it came to office. Mr. Waldron mentions the surprising effect of the "axis of evil" speech, but including the North Koreans in the evil trinity of global terrorism can only be described as overreaching. The fact that there was no concerted effort by the United States even to attempt to resolve the nuclear problem in North Korea before 9/11 is as revealing as Clinton's failures.

I am impressed with Mr. Waldron's insightful acknowledgement of the need to deter nuclear-armed Communist governments by allowing our allies a similar capability. He understands that by weakening the forces of existing democracies in East Asia, we make the goal of changing the regime of North Korea a fool's dream.

Byungwook Min
Boston, Massachusetts

To the Editor:

I agree with much of Arthur Waldron's critique of how the U.S. has handled relations with North Korea. But there are some significant problems with his recommendation that we

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"strengthen the deterrent, which is to say, the offensive, powers of our allies." This, he says, means "working with our friends and allies to develop a genuinely shared offensive capability such as NATO possessed during the cold war."

Unfortunately, Mr. Waldron does not provide details about what this would involve. NATO's "shared offensive capability" was founded on a "dual-key system" in which American nuclear weapons were in the joint control of American and foreign officers. Does he envision a similar system involving South Korean and Japanese officers? In principle this may be possible and would provide a significant deterrent. In practice, however, such a plan would likely face considerable political opposition in both South Korea and Japan.

A second problem with Mr. Waldron's recommendation is that even if it could be implemented and made credible, it would deter only direct attack by North Korea against South Korea and Japan. It would not deter North Korea's efforts to share its nuclear capabilities with other countries or terrorist groups. Instead, we need to make very clear to Kim Jung Il and his coterie that assisting a hostile terrorist organization would constitute an act of war, and that his regime would, as a result, be brought to an end.

MICHAEL F. ALTFELD
Falls Church, Virginia

ARTHUR WALDRON writes:

My article started with the bleak but realistic assumption that North Korea will never give up its nuclear weapons, no matter what any other country says or offers, and even if it promises to do so. I then explored the unsatisfactory options with which this possibility leaves the democratic countries. I identified the greatest danger as the acceptance of a sham agreement, like the one China is urging in the present six-party negotiations: that is to say, one that defers the real nuclear problem far into the future by creating a series of time-consuming stages involving aid from the West and assertions—short of actual disarmament—from Pyongyang.

This approach is politically appealing in an election year, and is very close to the one adopted by the Clinton administration with its "Agreed Framework," which provided generous aid to North Korea and even a pledge to construct two "safer" reactors for its power needs in return for promises that turned out to be worthless. So far, I reported, the Bush administration has shown few signs of going down this path, in spite of Chinese urgings. Should it end up doing so, it would risk wrecking the Japanese-American alliance, which is the keystone of security in East Asia.

Implicit in my essay, however, was a larger issue. The dictatorial and Communist states of Asia, notably China and North Korea, have engaged in conventional and nuclear arms buildups that (especially in the case of China) have elicited remarkably little response from the West. Contrasted to those buildups is American policy toward our democratic Asian allies: namely, to limit them to "defensive" weapons. Thus, we have intervened once to stop a South Korean nuclear program and twice to stop a program in Taiwan.

This is an inadequate, indeed dangerous, response. To the challenge of growing offensive power in the hands of the dictatorships, we have offered our allies dialogue, diplomacy, and finally defense in the form of anti-missile systems. But while such systems are desirable, no missile defense is capable of stopping every single missile fired, and any such system can be overwhelmed by the launch of more missiles than it has interceptors. Hence my conclusion: only a deterrent capability in the hands of the democracies—that is, offensive systems sufficiently powerful to frighten adversaries so that they will not dare to launch attacks—can stabilize the situation and maintain the peace.

TWO OF my correspondents are more optimistic than I, and suggest ways by which a purely diplomatic process could lead North Korea to abandon its dangerous nuclear program. The third is even more pessimistic than I was.

For a time last summer, the Bush administration seemed to have identified China as the key to solving the North Korean problem: somehow Beijing could accomplish what we could not, by using its putatively enormous influence in Pyongyang. To me this was a pipe dream: for whatever reason, Beijing is more interested in using the six-party talks to obtain leverage over the U.S. on other issues than in actually solving the problem.

Marc Salzberger disagrees. Korea, he writes, is in fact "China's vassal" and has little choice but to do what Beijing says. "Should China turn its back on Pyongyang," he writes, "North Korea would be devastated, not least psychologically, and Kim would know that he was lost." Therefore, Washington's error lies not in the attempt to work through China but in the failure to "push China aggressively enough."

I find this unconvincing. Were I to characterize the relationship between North Korea and China, I would be tempted to say the opposite: that China is, in a paradoxical way, North Korea's vassal. In particular, Beijing has no desire for yet another Communist regime to collapse, let alone one with which it shares a long border. Nor would it welcome North Korea's unification with South Korea, which would create a military power, German in scale, controlling sea lanes to Beijing and access to the Sea of Japan, not to mention claiming territory in Manchuria that is now under China's control.

Thus, to repeat, Beijing is North Korea's vassal, for which privilege it pays a very high price both diplomatically and materially. Beijing may not approve of North Korea's actions, but it has no choice but to support its neighbor, since the consequences of North Korean failure would be even more dangerous. Therefore, as Beijing sees things, its interest lies not in disarming North Korea but in getting other countries to share the burdens of keeping that regime afloat.

Let us suppose that we followed Mr. Salzberger's advice to push China "aggressively." How exactly would we proceed? Would our ambassador seek a

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meeting with President Hu Jintao and pound the table, demanding that China do more? It is hard to imagine anything like this succeeding unless backed by draconian sanctions against China. What would those be? Threats to cut off market access? Speeches in the UN?

But let us further suppose that, miraculously, China agreed. What then? If it cut off oil and food supplies to North Korea, and no one stepped in to fill the gap, a full-scale crisis would result, with the Communist regime teetering on the edge of collapse and refugees fleeing into both China and South Korea. That would be a nightmare for Beijing. And if South Korea intervened to help North Korea, which in my view is likely, that would merely undercut the effectiveness of China's cutoff and start both Koreas on the road to reunification—which Beijing likewise fears.

Could China pull off a coup in Pyongyang? Perhaps, but any figure strong enough to lead North Korea would be unreliable from Beijing's point of view, and would certainly be unwilling to abandon the nuclear program. Could China undertake military operations against North Korea? Again perhaps, but were it to invade, the result would probably be general war; when the smoke cleared, I suspect China as well as Korea would have sustained grievous damage, the North Korean nuclear weapons would still be secure in some hidden bunker, and all Koreans, North and South, would be filled with hatred for China. In short, if you think the China option through, it reveals itself to be a mirage.

Byungwook Min is also more optimistic than I. Blaming the lack of resolution on an American policy that "has been inconsistent at best and often indifferent and ignorant," he nevertheless insists that the Clinton administration's approach "would have worked had the U.S. stayed the course and kept communicating with the North Koreans."

I agree about the problems with U.S. diplomacy, but I am skeptical of the conclusion. During the Clinton period of engagement and the "Agreed Framework," the North Koreans created a *second* clandestine nuclear program in order to make a show of abandoning the one that had been discovered. This suggests that they were not negotiating in good faith, but rather following the ancient Chinese military theorist Sun Zi, well known in both Koreas, who states: "All war is deception." Still, I agree with Mr. Min that we should communicate more with North Korea, and I thank him for endorsing my proposal "to deter nuclear-armed Communist governments by allowing our allies a similar capability." To me this is an obvious proposition, but it is not popular in Washington.

FINALLY, WE have the letter from Michael F. Altfeld, seeking to show that my proposals would not only be difficult to implement but also inadequate. Mr. Altfeld complains that I have not "provided details" of what would be involved in working with friends and allies to develop a genuinely shared offensive capability such as NATO possessed during the cold war. I invoked NATO because, for all the obvious reasons, I would like the free states of Asia to acquire a credible deterrence within the framework of an alliance. As for the "double key" system, I am agnostic: as I understand it, it applied only to *American* nuclear weapons in NATO; Britain and France, having their own independent deterrents, would not have needed American approval to launch. I think it would be better if our Asian allies had the same ability: they are, after all, constitutional states and far more stable and trustworthy than North Korea, or Pakistan, or even China. They should deter North Korea themselves, with the United States in the background.

Mr. Altfeld's second concern is the possible supply of nuclear weapons to terrorists by North Korea. To this I have no good answer. My expectation is that terrorists will soon acquire such weapons if they have not done so already. It is true, moreover, that even a deterrent policy like the one I propose will not prevent North Korea, or any other nuclear state, from transferring technology—as, for example, China did to Pakistan.

This is a truly chilling prospect. In the face of it, Mr. Altfeld suggests, "we need to make it very clear to Kim Jong Il and his coterie that assisting a hostile terrorist organization would constitute an act of war, and that his regime would, as a result, be brought to an end." Strong words; but how would we apply them? If a mushroom cloud appeared over Washington or Tel Aviv, we would not know its provenance. If, on the other hand, we should—miraculously—intercept a North Korean airliner or ship carrying nuclear weapons to some rogue state or terrorist group, would that really be sufficient grounds to launch a massive nuclear strike on North Korea, killing many of its 21 million inhabitants? Furthermore, North Korea does have allies, so any such action could lead to wider war. That is one reason why, when China was proliferating to Pakistan, successive American administrations did nothing, lest delicate relations be upset. And it is why I do not believe that a threat to destroy North Korea, even if it were discovered transferring nuclear materials to terrorists, would be politically credible.

Let me conclude with two broad observations. The first, now a matter of intense controversy, concerns the degree to which both the 9/11 attacks and our subsequent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have disclosed a possibly fatal flaw in U.S. preparedness. Our knowledge of our potential adversaries is still almost nonexistent; we rely too much on "technical means" rather than on agents on the ground, and on often unreliable material from exiles, allied intelligence services, and similar sources. The first step in addressing a whole range of issues, existing and looming, is a reform of the CIA, NSA, DIA, and other organizations that have failed at their tasks. I have never understood why President Bush did not order this, if not on his first day in office, then at least immediately after 9/11.

Second, we must learn

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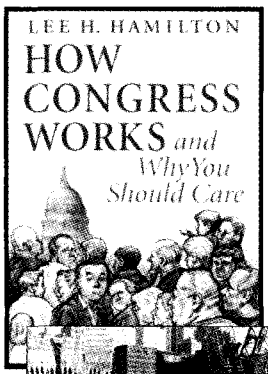

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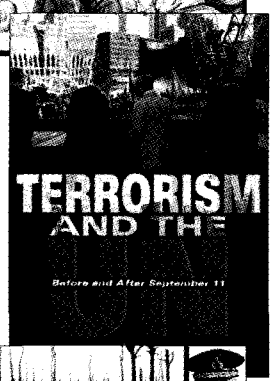

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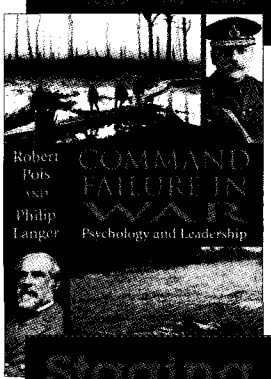

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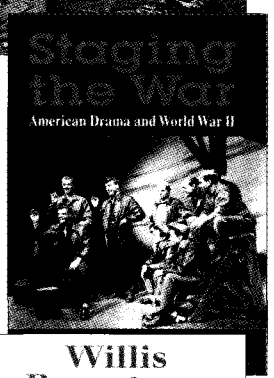

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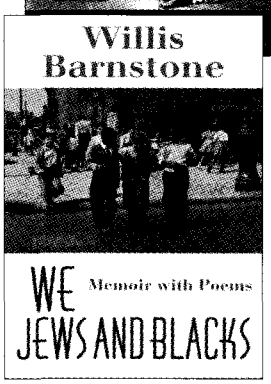

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once again that deterrence keeps the peace. Too often we have imagined that if only we would restrain ourselves and our allies (as we have done by limiting the South Korean missile program, or allowing the Taiwanese military to fall behind for years), our actions would be reciprocated. Events have proved this assumption false.

The balance of terror kept us relatively safe during the cold war. In Asia, however, none of the democracies is in a position to frighten its adversaries. The result is an unstable situation that may tempt others to see if they can perhaps launch a quick operation and win. Such a state of mind, which China seems to be developing, is extremely dangerous.

The moral of the story: democracy is good, and it has flourished in Asia beyond anyone's expectations. But we need more than just democracies; we need militarily strong democracies. The lesson of World War II and many other wars is that not only is there nothing wrong with democracies being militarily stronger than their dictatorial adversaries, but that both peace and the future of democracy require it.

Big Government

TO THE EDITOR:

I was interested to see that Daniel Casse agrees with me: George W. Bush's conservatism is one that tries to implant choice and accountability in government programs and not one that tries to reduce the size and scope of government ["Is Bush a Conservative?," February]. This has been apparent since candidate Bush began unveiling his domestic-policy platform in May 1999. Still, many conservatives are disappointed with the small amount of choice and accountability Bush has extracted from Congress. School vouchers were dropped from the education bill with not so much as a whimper. The Medicare bill contains too little choice and too much government authority.

What these conservatives need to keep in mind is that Bush has had to work with Congresses with very narrow Republican majorities—and with a Democratic majority in the Senate from June 2001 to January 2003. House Speaker Dennis Hastert and Majority Leaders Richard Armey and Tom DeLay have done a brilliant job delivering majorities for legislation in a House that has had no more than 229 Republicans—just eleven more than a majority—and a Democratic caucus almost totally united on the other side.

To hold together that majority, the House leaders and the President have had to accept higher spending levels than they would have liked and a Medicare bill they considered far from ideal. They also had to accept a farm bill tilted toward cotton and other Southern crops because Larry Combest, the chairman of the Agriculture Committee in 2002, was from a cotton-growing Texas district. Combest resigned from the House in early 2003. Had he left a year earlier, the chairman when the farm bill was marked up would have been Bob Goodlatte, who represents a Virginia district with little in the way of subsidized crops, and the bill would have looked quite different. Of such accidents is public policy sometimes made.

The sudden revulsion of conservatives at spending levels makes it likely that the House will hold spending down, perhaps even more than in the President's budget. If so, Bush will surely go along. He may veto some bills, but he is under a political imperative to hold the House Republican majority together, since without it the legislation he gets will be even more unpalatable. Bush's father had to deal with a Democratic House and ended up with a legislative record that most conservatives considered liberal: changes in the Clean Air Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the 1990 tax increase. Maintaining a Republican majority in the House and keeping it happy have been necessary in order for Bush to get legislative results. Given the narrow Republican majorities he has enjoyed, these results represent impressive advances toward choice and accountability.

MICHAEL BARONE
U.S. News & World Report
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Casse quotes me accurately in his article, but I fear he inadvertently leaves a misleading impression of my views. Mr. Casse writes: "Speaking for many, Ramesh Ponnuru in *National Review* laid out the brief against the President as of last September." There follows a passage I wrote listing the various ways President Bush has expanded the federal government, from his imposition of steel tariffs to his defense build-up to his approval of new law-enforcement powers.

That list was not meant, however, as an indictment of the President. It was, precisely, a list of ways he has expanded the government, with no intended implication that all such expansions are wrong. A few sentences later, I wrote: "Conservatives are, of course, inclined to tolerate, indeed cheer, most of the government's efforts to wage the war on terrorism." I myself support the new money for defense and the new powers for law enforcement, and I have defended the latter against the mostly ignorant and foolish criticisms of self-styled "civil libertarians" of both the Left and the Right.

RAMESH PONNURU
National Review
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

No matter which word one uses, it remains true even on Daniel Casse's own showing that President Bush has presided over an expansion in the size, influence, and regulatory power of the federal government, coupled with a corresponding decrease in private choice, the like of which we have not seen since at least the days of Lyndon Johnson. This trend, apparent since the first month of the administration, has become more evident since 9/11.

Still, given the overwhelming importance of how our foreign policy is conducted, the question of nomenclature is irrelevant. If we do not win the war on terrorism, if we show weakness and back away from our position, what happened on 9/11 will be nothing as compared with what will be brought against us. The

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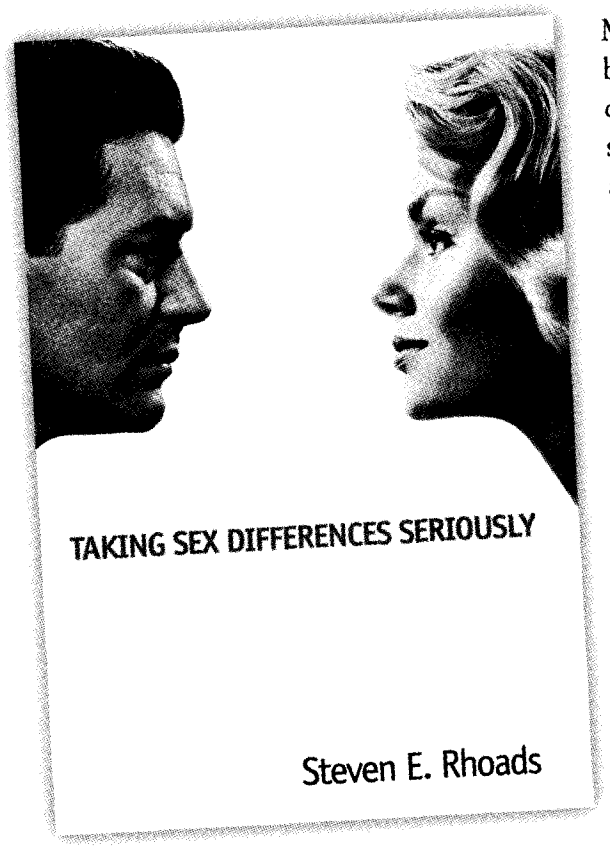

Most current discussions of sex differences between men and women assume that they are determined by society rather than biology. It is society that teaches little girls to be feminine and little boys to be masculine; society that tells women to respond to babies and men to respond to sports and warfare. Because men and women are virtually interchangeable, so the argument goes, men should do an exactly equal share of domestic and childrearing work so that women can compete equally outside the home.

There's only one problem. Whatever we might like to believe, Dr. Steven Rhoads shows, sex differences remain a deeply rooted part of human nature.

In *Taking Sex Differences Seriously*, Dr. Rhoads assembles a wealth of scientific evidence showing that these differences are "hardwired" into our biology. They range from the subtle (women instinctively carry babies on their left side, near the maternal heartbeat) to the profound (women with high testosterone levels are more promiscuous, more competitive, and more conflicted about having children than women with normal levels).

Rhoads explores male/female disparities in aggression and dominance, in sexuality and nurturing. Denial of these differences, he shows, has affected developments such as the sexual revolution and fatherless families, and policies such as Title IX and the call for universal day care. But while acknowledging these differences is important, Rhoads also believes that society is improved by discouraging some natural tendencies, like men's desire for irresponsible sex, and encouraging others, like women's interest and talent in caring for babies.

Dr. Steven Rhoads dispels social clichés and spotlights biological realities in this provocative book. Meticulously researched and elegantly written, *Taking Sex Differences Seriously* is a groundbreaking look at the way we are.

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only issue that will count in November is the resolve of the candidates on this point.

RICHARD DURANT
Grosse Pointe, Michigan

TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Casse offers a compelling analysis of the brand of conservatism President Bush actually practices. Bush's vindication, in the face of the media's often hysterical criticism, lies in the decimation of al Qaeda, the liberation of Iraq and Afghanistan, the capture of Saddam Hussein, the disarming of Libya, and an economy restored to vigor.

ED HARDIMAN
Arlington, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Is Bush a Conservative?" Daniel Casse writes that "Bush, Sr. was famously confronted by Patrick J. Buchanan, who actually beat him in the New Hampshire primary." This is incorrect. Although Buchanan did well in New Hampshire, Bush won the state by eighteen points.

NOAH WILLIAMS
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

DANIEL CASSE writes:

I am grateful for Michael Barone's insights into how the closely divided House of Representatives has shaped the Bush administration's legislation, a topic I did not sufficiently address in my article. But as he knows, Presidents are not simply creatures of the Congress they deal with. What is impressive to me about Bush is that he has launched new directions for education, health care, law enforcement, and foreign policy *despite* the narrow majorities in the House and Senate.

Ramesh Ponnuru is right to distinguish himself from critics who believe that every increase in government spending is a retreat from conservative principle. His list of the ways in which Bush has expanded government, which I cited in my article, reinforces my point that the size and scope of government may no longer be the best way to measure the achievements of a conservative president.

I agree with Richard Durant that the fight against terrorism ought to be the main issue at stake in the November election. Alas, recent polling suggests the public may not share this view.

Finally, I thank Ed Hardiman for his concurrence and Noah Williams for pointing out my error in stating that Patrick J. Buchanan won the New Hampshire primary in 1992. He in fact won it in 1996.

UN Watch

TO THE EDITOR:

Anne Bayefsky's superb article needs no embellishment ["The UN and the Jews," February]. She effectively condemns the United Nations and its leadership for virtually abandoning the central focus of its creation as expressed in its charter: "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women." The UN's record of contempt for Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East and the sole state in the region committed to these fundamental principles, supports that condemnation.

Since 1964, the UN has enacted more than 400 General Assembly and 80 Security Council resolutions highly critical of Israel. The UN's so-called World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa turned into an anti-Semitic orgy, leading the United States to withdraw its delegation. In 2002, the UN Commission on Human Rights, headed by Mary Robinson, not only condemned Israel but confirmed "the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to resist Israeli occupation" in a context that clearly justified suicide bombings against Israeli civilians.

That same year, Israel's military intervention in Jenin, a town believed to have been the origin of a terrorist attack, was labeled a "massacre" by the UN and European authorities, who condemned the killing of "thousands" of Palestinians. A later UN investigation discovered that 24 Israeli soldiers and 52 Palestinians, most of them combatants, were killed. Finally, the UN has created three separate Palestinian task forces, each with large UN-paid staffs, which promulgate the anti-Israel message of the PLO. And these instances—together with others cited by Anne Bayefsky—are only the tip of the iceberg.

The principles of the UN, as reflected in its charter, provide us with the direction we must take in fighting the chaos that threatens Israel, the U.S., and the rest of the civilized world. At the initiative of Freedom House, the U.S. began a process in 2000 to establish a world-wide Community of Democracies. Under the leadership of Secretary of State Madeline Albright and in cooperation with Poland, Chile, Mali, South Korea, and others, the first organized meeting of about 100 states took place in Warsaw in June 2000. A second meeting, strongly supported by Secretary of State Colin Powell, took place in Seoul in November 2002. A third meeting, with, one hopes, more stringent standards for admission, is scheduled next year in Chile. The purpose of the Community is "the promotion of democratic government." Its unanimously agreed-upon program includes the formation of a UN Caucus of Democratic States.

An international body like the UN, to which even authoritarian states belong, is highly desirable. Discussion and constructive exchange may flow from it. But it is important not to bestow on such a body the appearance of principle or wisdom. For that, a united force, committed to human rights and democracy, must exist within the United Nations.

AMBASSADOR MAX M. KAMPELMAN
Freedom House
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Anne Bayefsky has written an important and insightful piece. Congratulations to COMMENTARY for shedding some light on a critical subject that gets far too little attention.

Yet the article fails to mention what is perhaps the UN's most egregious act against Israel. The UN belatedly admitted that it had misled Israel regarding videotapes of Hizballah's abduction of three Israeli

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soldiers from the Lebanese border on October 7, 2000. The tapes, made by UNIFIL (the UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon), contained crucial forensic evidence. First the UN denied that such tapes existed, then it issued false reports of what the tapes showed, and finally it refused to turn them over to Israel.

Since the remains of these soldiers—Adi Avitan, Benny Avraham, and Omar Souad—were returned to Israel in February (along with a kidnapped Israeli businessman) in exchange for over 400 Palestinian terrorists, this is a particularly timely moment to note such despicable conduct. Many open questions remain, including the possible complicity of members of UNIFIL with the Hizballah attackers. So far, this matter has not seemed to warrant the attention of Kofi Annan.

ALAN FELD
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Anne Bayefsky's fine article should be required reading for "internationalists" who are hoodwinked by UN rhetoric and cannot see that organization for what it is: a forum existing for the sole purpose of thwarting the interests of the U.S. and Israel.

STEVE ALEXANDER
Destin, Florida

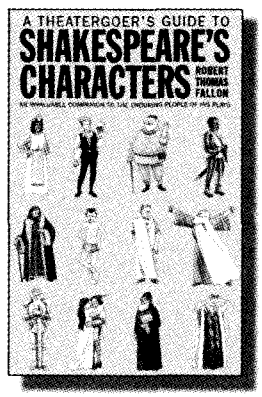
ANNE BAYEFSKY writes:

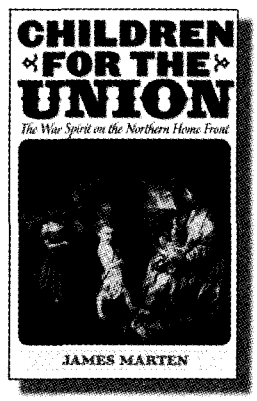
As Steve Alexander suggests, it is indeed the case that the U.S. and Israel—and all states sharing democratic values—face in the UN a common threat. The war against terrorism makes this connection very clear. Thus, while Alan Feld is right to draw attention to the UN's role in the Hizballah abductions of three Israeli soldiers and the subsequent cover-up, the organization's response to the Palestinian terror campaign suggests it is open season on all Israelis.

The UN has no agreed-upon definition of terrorism. For years, UN adoption of a Comprehensive International Convention on Terrorism has failed because of opposition from the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which insists on a definition of terrorism that excludes suicide-bombing with Israeli victims. Or, as the Arab Terrorism Convention puts it, "all cases of struggle by whatever means" for approved causes are exempt.

The absence of a common understanding of what counts as terrorism makes the UN equally incapable of recognizing self-defense against terrorism, or distinguishing a "cycle of violence" from cause and effect. Though lip service is paid to Israel's right to defend itself, when Israel actually does anything concrete in self-defense it is condemned.

Targeting or killing Hamas leaders (Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Ismail Abu Shanab, Mahmoud al-Zahar) after deadly attacks against Israelis has been met by denunciations of illegal "extrajudicial killings" from Secretary General Kofi Annan and Terje Roed-Larsen, the special coordinator for the Middle East peace process. In fact, international law makes Yassin, Shanab, and al-Zahar fair targets. They are part of the command-and-control structure of a terrorist organization, combatants in a war and not entitled to





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a judicial process, particularly where—as here—Israel is unable to make arrests and the Palestinian Authority has no intention of doing so.

The UN's denial of the necessities of self-defense when it comes to Israel also takes the form of the constant accusation of a disproportionate use of force. In fact, the Geneva Conventions say that "civilians shall not be used to render . . . areas immune from military operations . . . in attempts to shield military objectives from attack." The rule stipulates that an attack on a military target "which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life" is prohibited if "excessive." Only in Israel's case does the UN apply this rule to require zero civilian deaths—as Roed-Larsen did on September 9, 2003 after Israel targeted and killed two Hamas "ticking bombs" in the midst of planning a suicide attack, and one civilian was also killed.

On the contrary, it is the Palestinian Authority that violates international law by permitting killers to live, socialize, and plot freely in densely populated neighborhoods, using these civilians as human shields. The UN gives a green light to terrorists by never once condemning this egregious violation.

In effect, the UN seeks to pin Israelis' arms behind their backs while the terrorists take aim, a goal recently on display in the judicial arena. The International Court of Justice in The Hague has now been asked by the General Assembly to condemn Israel's security fence. Among other items before the Court is the November 2003 report from the Secretary General detailing the harm to Palestinians that is said to result from the fence, without describing a single terrorist act against Israelis.

UN condemnation of Israeli actions against terrorism has broader implications for American and coalition actions in the global war on terror. From its Israel-focused launch pad, the UN has cast human rights in opposition to security, and used a search for "root causes" to derail the fight against terrorism. Anti-Semitism, however, never appears on the list of root causes. The recent UN *Arab Human Development Report* is only one more example of the canard that Israeli "occupation" is responsible for everything from Arab rejection of democracy, to Arab poverty, to the denial of equal rights for Arab women. Exactly the same mentality now condemns the "occupation" of the United States and its coalition partners for every imaginable failure in Iraq.

Ambassador Max M. Kampelman eloquently pleads for a realignment within the UN so that democratic actors will have greater control over its outcomes. I am not optimistic—in part because many democratic states, like those in the European Union, believe that their interests lie halfway between the sponsors of terrorism and the United States. UN reform is a project that is destined to outlive the immediate needs of the war against terror. Threading American foreign policy through the eye of a to-be-revised UN is a prescription we cannot afford to follow.

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Commentary
May 2004

The Oil-for-Food Scam: What Did Kofi Annan Know, and When Did He Know It?

Claudia Rosett

For years, the United Nations Oil-for-Food program was just one more blip on the multilateral landscape: a relief program for Iraq, a way to feed hungry children in a far-off land until the world had settled its quarrels with Saddam Hussein. Last May, after the fall of Saddam, the UN Security Council voted to lift sanctions on Iraq, end Oil-for-Food later in the year, and turn over any remaining business to the U.S.-led authority in Baghdad. On November 20, with some ceremony, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan lauded the program's many accomplishments, praising in particular its long-serving executive director, Benon Sevan. The next day, Oil-for-Food came to an end.

But it has not ended. Suddenly, Oil-for-Food is with us again, this time splashed all over the news as the subject of scandal at the UN: bribes, kickbacks, fraud, smuggling; stories of graft involving tens of billions of dollars and countless barrels of oil, and implicating big business and high officials in dozens of countries; allegations that the head of the program himself was on the take. In February, having at first denied any wrongdoing, Sevan stopped giving interviews and was then reported to be on vacation, heading into retirement. By March, the U.S. Congress was preparing to hold hearings into Oil-for-Food. Kofi Annan, having denied any knowledge of misdeeds by UN staff, finally bowed to demands for an independent inquiry into the UN program, saying, "I don't think we need to have our reputation impugned."

The tale has been all very interesting, and all very complicated. For those who look yearningly to the UN for answers to the world's problems, it has provoked, perhaps, some introspection about the pardonable corruption that threatens even the most selfless undertakings. For those who believe the UN can do nothing right, Oil-for-Food, whatever it was about, is a delicious vindication that everyone and everything at the world organization is crooked, the institution a fiasco, and politicians who support it fit for recall at the next electoral opportunity.

The excitement may be justified, but a number of important facts and conclusions have gone missing. Oil-for-Food, run by the UN from 1996 to 2003, did, in fact, deliver some limited relief to Iraqis. It also evolved into not only the biggest but the most extravagant, hypocritical, and blatantly perverse relief program ever administered by the UN. But Oil-for-Food is not simply a saga of one UN program gone wrong. It is also the tale of a systematic failure on the part of what is grandly called the international community.

Oil-for-Food tainted almost everything it touched. It was such a kaleidoscope of corruption as to defy easy summary, let alone concentration on the main issues. But let us try.

Claudia Rosett, *who contributes a bi-weekly column on foreign affairs to the* Wall Street Journal*'s online edition, OpinionJournal.com, is a senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and an adjunct fellow of the Hudson Institute.*

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OIL-FOR-FOOD had its beginnings in the UN sanctions imposed on Iraq following Saddam Hussein's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait. These prohibited UN member states from trading with Iraq until the regime had satisfactorily disarmed. Saddam refused to comply, and in the aftermath of the first Gulf war the sanctions remained in place. (Even under sanctions, Iraqis were theoretically allowed to import essential foods and medicines, but Saddam's repressive system prevented them from earning the necessary foreign exchange.) Reports fed by Saddam's regime soon began to surface that the sanctions were imposing severe suffering on ordinary Iraqis. The UN, then led by Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, broached the idea of allowing Iraq to sell oil in limited quantities, strictly to buy relief supplies.

At first, Saddam resisted this, too. But in the mid-1990's, perhaps because he was feeling the pinch, or quite likely because he had by then seen ways and built up the leverage to turn such a plan to his advantage, he finally agreed. On April 14, 1995, the UN (then under Boutros Boutros-Ghali) passed Resolution 986, authorizing as a "temporary measure" what become known as the Oil-for-Food program, and then spent months working out with Saddam the details of implementation.

From the start, the program was poorly designed. Saddam had blamed the fate of starving Iraqi children on the sanctions regime and specifically on the United States. Seeking to address these charges, the Clinton administration went looking for a compromise; with the Secretariat in the lead, the Security Council agreed to conditions on Oil-for-Food that were, to say the least, amenable to manipulation. Saddam, the author of the miseries of Iraq, was given the right to negotiate his own contracts to sell Iraqi oil and to choose his own foreign customers. He was also allowed to draw up the shopping lists of humanitarian supplies—the "distribution plans"—and to strike his own deals for these goods, picking his foreign suppliers. The UN also granted Saddam a say in the choice of the bank that would mainly handle the funds and issue the letters of credit to pay these suppliers; the designated institution was a French bank now known as BNP Paribas.[1]

To be sure, the UN reserved for itself the authority to reject Saddam's proposed contracts and his plans for distribution of goods inside Iraq; to control the program's bank accounts; and to ensure that Saddam's buying and selling were in compliance with the UN's humanitarian plan. As spelled out in Resolution 986, oil was to be sold "at fair-market value," and the proceeds were to pay solely for goods and services that would be used "for equitable distribution of humanitarian relief to all segments of the Iraqi population throughout the country."

To all this, the UN added another twist. Unlike most of its relief programs, in which both the cost of the relief itself and UN overhead were paid for by contributions from member states, Oil-for-Food would in every respect be funded entirely out of Saddam's oil revenues. The UN Secretariat would collect a 2.2-percent commission on every barrel of Iraqi oil sold, plus 0.8 percent to pay for UN weapons inspections in Iraq.

If the aim of this provision was to make Saddam bear the cost of his own obstinacy, the effect was to create a situation in which the UN Secretariat was paid handsomely, on commission, by Saddam—to supervise Saddam. And the bigger Oil-for-Food got, the bigger the fees collected by Annan's office. Over the seven years of the program, oil sales ultimately totaled some $65 billion. On the spending side, the UN says $46 billion went for aid to Iraq, and $18.2 billion was paid out as compensation to victims of Saddam's 1990-91 occupation of Kuwait. As for commissions to the Secretariat, these ran to about $1.9 billion, of which $1.4 billion was earmarked for administrative overhead for the humanitarian program (the UN says it turned over $300 million of this to help pay for relief, but no public accounting has ever been given) and another $500 million or so for weapons inspections in Iraq. Discrepancies in these numbers can be chalked up to interest paid on some of the funds, exchange-rate fluctuations, or simply the murk in which most of the Oil-for-Food transactions remain shrouded to this day.

WHETHER SADDAM should have enjoyed the right to dispose of all Iraqi oil was never questioned. In Iraq, oil was the province of a state monopoly, which Saddam in effect claimed for his own, and on that basis was the UN deal struck. The arrangement actually helped strengthen Saddam's chokehold at home. With sanctions effectively forbidding all other foreign commerce, Iraq's only legitimate trade was whatever flowed through Saddam's ministries under the supervision of the UN program. Thus the UN gave to Saddam

[1] As of 2001, one of the largest shareholders in BNP was Iraqi-born Nadhmi Auchi, among Britain's richest citizens. In the 1980's Auchi had brokered business deals for Saddam; last year he was convicted in France of illicit profiteering as part of the huge Elf oil scandal. The UN says the Oil-for-Food contract was awarded to BNP on a strictly competitive basis.

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the entire import-export franchise for Iraq, taking upon itself the responsibility for ensuring that he would use this arrangement to help Iraq's 26 million people. The success of the program depended wholly on the UN's integrity, competence, and willingness to prevent Saddam from subverting the setup to his own benefit.

This was perhaps an impossible brief. But the Secretariat eagerly shouldered the burden, accepting along with it the commissions that flowed straight from Iraq's oil spigots. Introduced as an ad-hoc deal, Oil-for-Food soon took on the marks of a more permanent arrangement. It was a project in which Annan had a direct hand from the beginning. As Under-Secretary General, he had led the first UN team to negotiate with Saddam over the terms of the sales under Oil-for-Food. The first shipment went out in December 1996; the following month, Annan succeeded Boutros-Ghali as Secretary-General.

Nine months later, in October 1997, Annan tapped Benon Sevan, an Armenian Cypriot and longtime UN official, to consolidate and run the various aspects of the Iraq relief operation under a newly established agency called the Office of the Iraq Program (but usually referred to simply as Oil-for-Food). Sevan served as executive director for the duration, reporting directly to Annan. The program was divided into roughly six-month phases; at the start of each phase, Sevan would report and Annan would recommend the program's continuation to the Security Council, signing off directly on Saddam's "distribution plans."

An issue that would later become important was how, precisely, the responsibilities for executing the program were parceled out between the Security Council—a committee of fifteen member states—and the Secretariat, run by Annan. All of Saddam's proposed contracts flowed through the Security Council, which doubled as the Iraq "sanctions committee." But in practice, the fifteen member governments were mostly on the watch for so-called dual-use items: goods that might be used to make weapons.

As it turned out, only two of the five permanent, veto-wielding members appear to have done any overseeing at all. These were the UK and the U.S., both of which had almost no direct business with Saddam's Iraq. The UN representatives of the other three—France, Russia, and China—devoted their energies chiefly to urging expansion of the program and forwarding the paperwork submitted by the many contractors in their respective nations whom Saddam had selected as his buyers and suppliers. As for the ten rotating members of the Security Council, some—like Syria—were among Saddam's favored trading partners, while most of the others lacked the resources to keep track of the huge volume of business the program soon generated.

If final responsibility lay anywhere at all, it lay with the Secretariat. It was this body that fielded a substantial presence in Iraq (the U.S., apart from weapons inspectors ejected early on, had none), employing at the height of the program some 3,600 Iraqis plus 893 international staff working in Iraq for the nine UN agencies coordinated by the Oil-for-Food office; another 100 or so were employed back in New York. The Secretariat was the keeper of the contract records and the books, and controller of the bank accounts, with sole power to authorize the release of Saddam's earnings to pay for imports to Iraq. The Secretariat arranged for audits of the program, was the chief interlocutor with Saddam, got paid well for its pains, and disseminated to the public extremely long reports in which most of the critical details of the transactions were not included.

One of the first changes introduced by Sevan was greater secrecy. According to John Fawcett, the co-author of a 70-page report on Saddam's finances released in 2002 by the Washington-based Coalition for International Justice, the UN had been fairly open about the specifics of Saddam's contracts during the first year of the program. From about 1998 on, however, it categorized the most germane details as "proprietary"—carefully guarding Saddam's privacy in his business deals. Thus, there was no disclosure of such basic information as the names of individual contractors or the price, quality, or quantity of goods involved in any given deal—all vital to judging the integrity of contracts.

Instead, the Office of the Iraq Program released long lists representing billions of dollars in business but noting only the date, country of origin, whether or not the contract had been approved for release of funding, and highly generic descriptions of goods. Typical of the level of detail were notations like "electric motor" from France, "adult milk" from Saudi Arabia, "detergent" from Russia, "cable" from China. Who in particular might be profiting, or at what price, was kept confidential. Nor did the UN disclose interest paid on the Oil-for-Food accounts at BNP Paribas or (possibly) other banks, which toward the end of the program held balances of more than $12 billion. Nor did it

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ever share with the public the details of how the $1.9 billion in commissions flowing from Saddam for aid and arms inspections (the latter were discontinued from late 1998 to late 2002) were spent by the UN Secretariat.

The year 1998, the first full year of the program under Sevan's directorship, is of special interest in this connection. For starters, if evidence cited in the *Wall Street Journal* turns out to be correct, this was the year in which Saddam's government may have begun covertly sending gifts of oil to Sevan himself by way of a Panamanian firm. It was also the year in which the UN terminated a contract with a UK-based firm, Lloyd's Register, for the crucial job of inspecting all Oil-for-Food shipments into Iraq, and replaced it with a Swiss-based firm, Cotecna Inspections, with ties to Kofi Annan's son Kojo. At the time, neither Cotecna nor the UN declared these ties as a possible conflict of interest, which they were.[2]

Also in 1998, at Sevan's urging, the UN expanded Oil-for-Food to allow Saddam to import not just food and medicine but oil-industry equipment, and at Annan's urging more than doubled the amount of oil Iraq was allowed to sell, raising the cap from roughly $4 billion to more than $10 billion per year. That same year, after much hindering and dickering, Saddam threw out the UN weapons inspectors—forbidding their return until the U.S. and Britain finally forced the issue four years later.

THIS BRINGS us to 1999-2000, when, following Sevan's urging, the program expanded yet further; with more funds devoted to the oil sector, and with the weapons inspectors gone, the UN now removed the limits on sales. In 2000, Saddam enjoyed a blockbuster year. By this time he was not only selling vastly more oil but had institutionalized a system for pocketing cash on the side.

It worked like this. Saddam would sell at below-market prices to his hand-picked customers—the Russians and the French were special favorites—and they could then sell the oil to third parties at a fat profit. Part of this profit they would keep, part they would kick back to Saddam as a "surcharge," paid into bank accounts outside the UN program, in violation of UN sanctions.

By means of this scam, Saddam's regime ultimately skimmed off for itself billions of dollars in proceeds that were supposed to have been spent on relief for the Iraqi people. When the scheme was reported in the international press—in November 2000, for example, Reuters carried a long dispatch about Saddam's demands for a 50-cent premium over official UN prices on every barrel of Iraqi oil—the UN haggled with Saddam but did not stop it.

Beyond that, Saddam had also begun smuggling out oil through Turkey, Jordan, and Syria. This was in flagrant defiance of UN sanctions and made a complete mockery of Oil-for-Food, whose whole point was to channel all of Saddam's trade. The smuggling, too, was widely reported in the press—and shrugged off by the UN. In the same period, Saddam imposed his own version of sanctions on the U.S., demanding that Oil-for-Food funds be switched from dollars into euros. The UN complied, thereby making it even harder for observers to keep track of its largely secretive and confusing bookkeeping.

As Oil-for-Food grew in size and scope, the U.S. mission to the UN began putting a significant number of its relief contracts on hold for closer scrutiny. Both Sevan and Annan complained publicly and often about these delays, describing them as injurious to the people of Iraq and urging the Security Council to push the contracts through faster. What Sevan did not convey was that, by 2000, complaints had begun reaching him about Iraqi government demands for kickbacks from suppliers on the *relief* side. These (according to a recent report in the *Financial Times*) Sevan simply buried, telling complainants to submit formal documents to the Security Council through their countries' UN missions (something they had no incentive to do since Saddam would most likely have responded by scrapping the deals altogether).

By 2002, the sixth year of the program, it was no longer credible that the UN Secretariat could be clueless about Saddam's systematic violations and exploitation of the humanitarian purpose of Oil-for-Food. On May 2, in a front-page story by Alix M. Freedman and Steve Stecklow, the *Wall Street Journal* documented in detail Saddam's illicit kickbacks on underpriced oil contracts, noting that "at least until recently, the UN has given Iraq surprising influence over the official price of its oil." In fact, against the resistance of Russia, France, China, and the UN Secretariat, the U.S. and Britain had been trying to put a halt to the kickbacks through an elaborate system to enforce fairer

[2] According to a spokesman at the UN Secretary-General's office, Kojo Annan had been a trainee at Cotecna from December 1995 to February 1998, and two months later was back at work for the firm as a consultant; his consultancy, which lasted until December 1998, thus coincided with the period during which the UN would have been receiving and reviewing bids for the Oil-for-Food inspection job. Both Kojo and Kofi Annan have denied that Kojo's consulting work was in any way related to the UN.

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pricing—but with only limited success. Sevan, clearly aware of the scam, was quoted in the *Journal* article as saying he had "no mandate" to stop it.

Apparently, however, there was a near-boundless mandate for the Secretariat to expand the scope of the spending. A mere fortnight later, on May 14, 2002, the Security Council passed a resolution cutting itself out of the loop entirely on all Oil-for-Food contracts deemed humanitarian, and giving direct power of approval to the Secretary-General. Henceforth, the Security Council would confine its oversight to items of potential dual use, such as chemical spraying equipment, or forbidden goods like highly enriched uranium, nuclear-reactor components, and the like. Unimpeded responsibility for the "humanitarian" aspect of the program fell to Annan.

The next month, "humanitarian" became a broad category indeed. On June 2, Annan approved a newly expanded shopping list by Saddam that the Secretariat dubbed "Oil-for-Food Plus." This added ten new sectors to be funded by the program, including "labor and social affairs," "information," "justice," and "sports." Either the Secretary-General had failed to notice or he did not care that none of these had anything to do with the equitable distribution of relief. By contrast, they had everything to do with the running of Saddam's totalitarian state. "Labor," "information," and "justice" were the realms of Baathist party patronage, propaganda, censorship, secret police, rape rooms, and mass graves. As for sports, that was the favorite arena of Saddam's sadistic son Uday, already infamous for torturing Iraqi athletes.

Then came the autumn of 2002, when President Bush delivered his warning to Saddam to comply with sixteen previous UN resolutions to disarm, and the U.S. persuaded the Security Council to pass a seventeenth. Though there was by this time no dearth of damning information in the public domain, Oil-for-Food rolled on. On September 18, the Coalition for International Justice released its heavily researched report, *Sources of Revenue for Saddam & Sons*, documenting rampant corruption and smuggling under UN sanctions and Oil-for-Food, warning of an Iraqi shift from "informal, on-the-sly deals" to increasingly "brazen and formal government-to-government arrangements," and asking how, "given . . . the world's largest humanitarian program ever, can there remain shortages of basic medicines and foodstuffs" in Iraq? Four months later, with Saddam still defiant and war looking likely, Annan signed a letter to the Security Council in which, among other things, he approved the use of $20 million in Oil-for-Food funds to pay for an "Olympic sport city" and $50 million to equip Saddam's propaganda arm, the Ministry of Information.[3]

By then, of course, debate over Iraq was raging in the Security Council, and the U.S. and Britain were bitterly at odds with France and Russia. Annan weighed in publicly on the side of the latter, urging yet more time and tolerance. He did not mention his own interest as the boss of a massive relief program funded by Saddam. Neither did he mention that Saddam's commercial deals heavily favored French and Russian companies, though he had access to actual numbers about those deals that, thanks to UN secretiveness, the public did not.

On March 17, with the U.S.-led coalition poised to invade, Annan pulled his international staff out of Iraq. Three days later, as coalition forces rolled into Iraq, he expressed regret that war had come "despite the best efforts of the international community and the United Nations." Describing the UN as the keeper of international "legitimacy," he assured the Iraqi people that, as soon as possible, the UN would be back to do "whatever it can to bring them assistance and support."

Following the fall of Saddam's regime, the U.S.-led coalition decided that Iraq had experienced enough of UN-style "assistance and support," at least as far as Oil-for-Food was concerned. With Russia and France suddenly willing to go along, perhaps to avoid scrutiny of Oil-for-Russia and Oil-for-France, the Security Council voted unanimously on May 22 that the program should be wound down. No more oil revenues were to flow in, but the UN Secretariat was to continue administering the remaining relief contracts until November, when any unfinished business would be turned over to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad.

At that stage, Oil-for-Food had close to $13 billion in BNP Paribas's Iraq accounts, most of it set aside to pay for contracts already approved. During the summer and early fall, the New York office began tidying up loose ends, renegotiating, "prioritizing," and basically removing the graft elements from the remaining contracts before handover to

[3] This is especially significant in light of the role that would be played by Saddam's televised propaganda during the war. In the event, Saddam may have had to rely on equipment brought in earlier under Oil-for-Food from places like France and Jordan. He was unable to take delivery of TV studio equipment ordered from Russia and approved and funded by the Secretariat on February 7, 2003, just six weeks before the war. But that was not for want of Kofi Annan's approval.

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the CPA. In these efforts, the UN got some prompting from the U.S. Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA)—the agency that has been auditing Halliburton's recent activities in Iraq.

From the thousands of remaining contracts, the DCMA (together with the Defense Contract Audit Agency) culled a batch of 759 of the largest deals, valued altogether at $6.9 billion. The reviewers estimated that among these contracts, almost half were overpriced by about 21 percent, for a total of $656 million that Saddam's regime had overpaid. This was in all likelihood the kickback component, part of which the suppliers were meant to share illicitly with the regime. Dryly, the DCMA's report adds that, in the course of its researches, "Some items of questionable utility for the Iraqi people (e.g., Mercedes Benz touring sedans) were identified."

By the time the Oil-for-Food office was finished renegotiating its contracts, it had scrapped more than a quarter of them. Some of the reasons, listed in UN public documents, are intriguing. There was, for example, the Syrian supplier of "spare parts for rotating equipment" whom it was "not possible to contact"; the Lebanese vendor of "welding machines" who was "unwilling to accept the 10-percent deduction"—i.e., a price minus the bribe-plus-kickback; and the Jordanian seller of school furniture whose contract had to be dropped because "company does not exist and the person in charge moved to Egypt."

Then came the formal ceremonies to which I have already alluded. On November 19, Sevan's office put out a press release praising Oil-for-Food as "one of the most efficient of UN programs." On November 20, Annan chimed in with his own praise for Oil-for-Food, paying tribute to the staff and "particularly to its executive director, Benon Sevan." On November 21, almost seven years after setting up shop as a temporary and limited measure to bring food and medicine to hungry people in Iraq, the program shut down, handing the CPA a royal mess.

SEVAN HAD assured the Security Council that, along with control of the more than $8 billion in funds and contracts still to be administered, the CPA would get "the entire Oil-for-Food database." In fact, the transfer was incomplete. Plenty of contract information was missing. So Byzantine were the BNP Paribas accounts that, rather than risk interrupting relief deliveries, the CPA simply left them under the management of the UN treasurer, who until almost a year after the fall of Saddam never got around to sending any current bank statements, let alone prior records.[4]

Meanwhile, however, the Iraqi Governing Council had itself begun to pore over records of the Saddam regime from various ministries, and former Baath officials were also starting to talk. On December 5, a British adviser to the Council, Claude Hankes-Drielsma, wrote from Baghdad to Annan, urging the UN to "take the moral high ground" and appoint an independent commission to investigate profiteering under Oil-for-Food.

Not a moment too soon: now the revelations were beginning to flow rapidly. On January 25 of this year, the Iraqi newspaper *Al-Mada* published a list, reportedly recovered from the Iraqi oil ministry, of some 270 individuals and entities in some 50 countries who were alleged to have received vouchers good for oil from Saddam Hussein. The list was an eye-opener. It included the former French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, British MP George Galloway, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, the Russian nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, a large number of Russian oil companies, the Russian state, and the Russian Orthodox Church. It also included the family name of the head of the UN Oil-for-Food program: Sevan.

Those named in *Al-Mada*'s list ignored, denied, or dismissed it on grounds that they had legitimately bought oil from Saddam. As for Sevan, he categorically repudiated the notion that he had ever received oil or oil money from the Iraqi regime, while Annan, in a statement more artfully hedged, said: "As far as I know, nobody in the Secretariat has committed any wrongdoing." A spokesman for the UN Secretariat repeated the by-now usual line that Oil-for-Food had been the most audited program at the UN—"audited to death" was the exact phrase—and in late February the Oil-for-Food office released a seven-page statement clearly aimed at deflecting blame for any graft involved with the program.

According to this official account, the Secretariat had no responsibility for confirming that contract-pricing was fair, or that suppliers were legitimate (that was the job of Saddam and the UN country missions); no responsibility for implementing the program (that too was the job of Saddam); no re-

[4] Not only the occupation authority but the Iraqis themselves have failed to penetrate the UN wall of disdain, although it is their own money they wish to know about. The Iraqi Central Bank began requesting copies of the relevant BNP bank statements in July 2003. Not until late March of this year, after I aired the matter in a piece in *National Review Online*, was there some halting sign of movement in the UN treasurer's office. Similar stonewalling—no accounting given, no access to statements—has met the repeated efforts of Kurds in northern Iraq to find out what happened to about $4 billion in separate allocations owed to them under Oil-for-Food.

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sponsibility for either spotting or stopping corruption by Saddam via Oil-for-Food contracts (that was the job of the Security Council); and no awareness of unauthorized oil exports (though the office confirmed its knowledge of "media reports on alleged violations"). By the light of this clarification, indeed, it was hard to tell what the Oil-for-Food program was, in fact, responsible for, beyond controlling the opaque bank accounts, checking that the contracts—honest or not—were properly punctuated, watching Saddam do whatever he chose, and collecting a 2.2-percent commission on his oil.

And so we arrive at the denouement—at least so far. On February 29, the *New York Times* published a long news article based on "a trove of internal Iraqi government documents and financial records" unearthed by the Iraqi Governing Council. The article described oil traders lugging suitcases full of illicit cash to the ministries and cited stacks of evidence showing that, through Oil-for-Food, Saddam's regime had squirreled away billions for itself while ordinary Iraqis received expired medicines and substandard rations.

Still the UN hung tough. On March 3, Hankes-Drielsma notified Annan that Iraqi authorities had asked an auditing firm, KPMG International, and a law firm, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, to prepare an independent report. In his letter, Hankes-Drielsma explained his reasoning:

> Based on the facts as I know them at the present time, the UN failed in its responsibility to the Iraqi people and the international community at large. The UN should not be surprised that the Iraqi people question the UN's credibility at this time and any future role for the UN in Iraq. It will not come as a surprise if the Oil-for-Food program turns out to be one of the world's most disgraceful scams and an example of inadequate control, responsibility, and transparency, providing an opportune vehicle for Saddam Hussein to operate under the UN aegis to continue his reign of terror and oppression.

On March 10 came confirmation that Annan's son Kojo had held a consultancy with Cotecna right around the time the company won the UN job to inspect goods coming into Iraq. On March 11 came an article in the *Wall Street Journal* detailing further links between Saddam's oil largesse and Sevan. The following week came word that Congress would hold hearings on Oil-for-Food. And on March 19, having ignored, stonewalled, and denied, Annan finally conceded that "it is highly possible there has been quite a lot of wrongdoing," and called for an independent inquiry.

As the various audits, investigations, and hearings gear up to delve into the saga of UN involvement in Saddam's Iraq, we may learn even more about his worldwide net of corruption. With skill, we may locate some of the billions he is believed to have salted away under UN oversight. With luck, we may get to this money ahead of the terrorists with whom he consorted—if they have not gotten to it already. Already known, for example, is that two firms doing business with Saddam through Oil-for-Food were linked to financier Ahmed Idris Nasreddin, now on the UN's own watchlist of individuals "belonging to or associated with" al Qaeda.

But let us retain our focus. That Saddam Hussein was a monster and a corrupt monster is not news. That he would exploit, for massive personal gain, a humanitarian program meant to relieve the miseries of his countrymen is horrifying but hardly astonishing. Nevertheless, any investigation that confines itself to detailing the abundantly evident corruption of Saddam Hussein will have missed the point.

What lies at the core of this story is the United Nations, and how it came to pass that an institution charged with bringing peace and probity to the world should have offered itself up—willingly, even eagerly—as the vehicle for a festival of abuse and fraud.

To begin with, Oil-for-Food was an enormous venture in central planning, the biggest project of its kind launched in many a decade and one that utterly ignored the lessons about such systems learned at agonizing cost over the past century. The UN Secretariat, in its well-paid arrogance, set out to administer virtually the entire economy of Iraq. Under its eye, all legitimate trading privileges became the franchise of a tyrant who laid first claim to every barrel of oil and every dollar (or euro) of proceeds. How could Oil-for-Food *not* help consolidate Saddam's grip on power? Nevertheless, it was with this grand thief of Baghdad that the UN cut its humanitarian deal, chalking in a fat commission for the Secretariat.

Nor did anyone in the UN system so much as lift an eyebrow, even after questions began to be raised. Last November, before the Security Council of the United Nations, the organization's Secretary-General proclaimed it a splendid achievement that the UN had legitimized a scheme by which 60 percent of Iraq's population depended entirely on the rationing cards of a totalitarian state. This was an event that should have seized the vaunted international community with horror. Instead, from out of

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the mouth of the Angolan ambassador who that month was chairing the UN Security Council there issued only unctuous praise for "the exceptionally important role of the program in providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Iraq."

But all that is only prelude. The scope of UN dereliction is much broader, encompassing factors institutional, personal, and, finally, political.

IT IS true that Oil-for-Food managed to deliver to Iraqis some portion of what it promised. On sales totaling $65 billion, some $46 billion (by Annan's uncheckable reckoning) went for "humanitarian" spending. Of this amount, an official total of $15 billion worth of food and health supplies—the original rationale for the program—had been received by the time Saddam fell. The actual figure was no doubt considerably less if you factor in the kickbacks and spoiled goods; from the remainder came the equipment for Saddam's oil monopoly, the construction materials, the TV studio systems, the carpets and air conditioners for the ministries, and all the rest.

But at what cost? Are we supposed to conclude that, in order to deliver this amount of aid, the UN had to approve Saddam's more than $100 billion worth of largely crooked business, had to look the other way while he skimmed money, bought influence, built palaces, and stashed away billions on the side, at least some of which may now be funding terror in Iraq or beyond?

No, something was at work here other than passive acquiescence. At precisely what moment during the years of Oil-for-Food did the UN Secretariat cross the line from "supervising" Saddam to collaborating with him? With precisely what deed did it enter into collusion? Even setting aside such obvious questions as whether individual UN officials took bribes, did the complicity begin in 1998, when Saddam flexed his muscles by throwing out the weapons inspectors and when Oil-for-Food, instead of leaving along with them, raised the cap on his oil sales? Did it come in 1999, when, even as Saddam's theft was becoming apparent, the UN scrapped the oil-sales limits altogether? Or in 2000 and 2001, when Sevan dismissed complaints and reports about blatant kickbacks? Did it start in 2002, when Annan, empowered by Oil-for-Food Plus, signed his name to projects for furnishing Saddam with luxury cars, stadiums, and office equipment for his dictatorship? Or did the defining moment arrive in 2003, when Annan, ignoring the immense conflict posed by the fact that his own institution was officially on Saddam's payroll, lobbied alongside two of Saddam's other top clients, Russia and France, to preserve his regime? Certainly by the time Annan and Sevan, neck-deep in revelatory press reports and standing indignantly athwart their own secret records, continued to offer to the world their evasions and denials, the balance had definitively tipped.

Annan's studied bewilderment is itself an indictment not only of his person but of the system he heads. If anyone is going to take the fall for the Oil-for-Food scandal, Sevan seems the likeliest candidate. But it was the UN Secretary-General who compliantly condoned Saddam's ever-escalating schemes and conditions, and who lobbied to the last to preserve Saddam's totalitarian regime while the UN Secretariat was swimming in his cash.

Annan has been with the UN for 32 years. He moved up through its ranks; he knows it well. He was there at the creation of Oil-for-Food, he chose the director, he signed the distribution plans, he visited Saddam, he knew plenty about Iraq, and one might assume he read the newspapers. We are left to contemplate a UN system that has engendered a Secretary-General either so dishonest that he should be dismissed or so incompetent that he is truly dangerous—and should be dismissed.

The final perfidy, though, is not personal but political. The UN, in the name of its own lofty principles, and to its rich emolument, actively helped sustain and protect a tyrant whose brutality and repression were the cause of Iraqi deprivation in the first place. What can this mean? The answer may be simply that, along with its secrecy, its massed cadres of bureaucrats beholden to the favor of the man at the top, its almost complete lack of accountability, external oversight, or the most elementary checks and balances, the UN suffers from an endemic affinity with anti-Western despots, and will turn a blind eye to the devil himself in order to keep them in power. Certainly there is much in its history and its behavior to support this view.

Perhaps, then, the complicity was there all along, built in, and was merely reinforced year after year as the UN collected the commissions and processed the funds that transformed Oil-for-Food into the sleaziest program ever to fly the UN flag and the single largest item on every budget of all nine UN agencies involved, plus the Secretariat itself. That, in the end, may be the dirty secret at the center of the Oil-for-Food scandal.

And is this the same United Nations that, now, we are planning to entrust with bringing democracy to Iraq?

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Jews, Christians, and "The Passion"

David Berger

MEL GIBSON'S *The Passion of the Christ* opened on February 25, Ash Wednesday. I planned to catch a noon showing that Friday, and I was a nervous wreck. Even setting aside the question of anti-Semitism, reviewers had depicted a movie so horrific, with clawed whips sending chunks of bloodied flesh flying across the screen, that I was not sure I could endure the experience. (In the aftermath of childhood nightmares, I have assiduously avoided fictional horror and cinematic gore alike.) But one can hardly undertake to write about a film whose controversial nature rests in part on its violence and close one's eyes when the going gets tough. And so I entered the theater in fear and trembling.

As the film unfolded, my reactions taught me something about one of the key issues in this entire affair—the critical role played by expectations and prior experience in molding a viewer's response. *The Passion* is indeed saturated with anti-Jewish motifs; and yet my expectation of anti-Semitism had been set at so high a level that I could barely muster more than a trace of indignation. The violence is interminable, central, and utterly graphic; but my trepidation had been ratcheted up to a point where I emerged from the theater with a sense of relief. Essentially, a film drenched in blood, suffused with sublime sentiments of sacrifice and forgiveness, and replete with images of venomous Jews left me neither uplifted nor viscerally outraged. Though I am more than capable of leaving a movie in tears, I left this one curiously unmoved.

My reaction no doubt resulted in part from the need to steel myself against surrendering to an experience that might rob me of sleep for months to come. But there was more to it than that. Despite its powerful cinematic effects, this is a film whose capacity to move depends in large measure on the viewer's ability to identify with Jesus of Nazareth for reasons that are not presented in the film itself. If you come with love and admiration for its hero, and all the more so if you come with faith in his divinity and his supreme self-sacrifice, every lash, every nail, every drop of blood will tear at your psyche. But for a viewer with neutral sentiments, or with little knowledge—or with the mixed emotions of a Jew acutely aware of the role of this story in unleashing persecution—the film provides little basis for empathy. Its unremitting violence remains just that.

Thus, I had great difficulty—and still do—in assimilating the assertion of some viewers that they had seen an Oscar-winning performance on the part of the film's Jesus (played by Jim Caviezel). Because of the very nature of Mel Gibson's faith, his Jesus must be a one-dimensional figure. After

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the first moments in the garden of Gethsemane, this is a man without inner conflict, without inner development, without complex, evolving relationships with others. Aside from a few flashbacks of the briefest duration, the task of the actor is to deliver melodramatic pronouncements and to writhe in agony. No one, however talented, could turn this into an Oscar-winning role. God is not a candidate for an Academy Award.

THE DISPUTES swirling around the movie are remarkably complex, conforming to conventional lines and at the same time cutting across them. With respect to the interfaith tensions spawned by this affair, Dennis Prager's observation that Jews and Christians have been seeing different movies is the beginning and perhaps even the middle of wisdom. But the film has also exacerbated divisions among Christians themselves—and among Jews—as well as confrontations between secular and religious Americans, with the potential to create new alliances and damage old ones. These shifting fault lines reflect and emerge out of a constellation of deeply entrenched Jewish fears, a half-century of Jewish-Christian dialogue and rapprochement, Christian attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the ambivalent alliance of Orthodox Jewry with the Christian Right, secularist and liberal Christian concerns about ascendant fundamentalism, traditionalist Christian resentments at widespread mockery of their beliefs and values, and more.

Thus, an entire essay could be devoted to the cultural politics of the Gibson affair, on exhibit in a vast multitude of opinion pieces in the news media, on television and radio, on the web, and in magazines occupying every point of the ideological spectrum. For purposes of manageability, but also because I believe this to be the most important issue of all, I mean to concentrate here on the aspect of the controversy touching directly on Christian-Jewish relations.

Gibson's project entered public consciousness when, last year, a group of Catholic and Jewish scholars reviewed a preliminary version of the screenplay and expressed deep reservations. When their suggestions for massive changes were transmitted to Gibson, his representatives charged that the script had been obtained improperly. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), which had encouraged the review, then backed away, failing to offer even a modicum of support to the authors, who came to be subjected to savage attacks.

The scholars had approached the screenplay from a perspective shared by only a handful of observers. They knew that the passion narrative had played a central role in fostering and unleashing anti-Jewish sentiments through the ages. They also knew that it had loomed large in the dramatically positive transformation of Jewish-Catholic relations ever since the declaration of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 that, "even though Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ, neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion." They knew that the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews had issued "guidelines" and "notes" about how to apply the Council's declaration in liturgy, education, and preaching. Finally, they knew that in 1988 the USCCB's Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs had issued "Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion."

The scholars can hardly be blamed for having assumed—naively, as it turned out—that the Conference took its own published standards seriously. Among other things, these criteria affirm that dramatizations of the passion should present the diversity of Jewish communities in Jesus' time; that Jews should not be portrayed as avaricious or bloodthirsty; that any "crowd scene" should reflect the fact that some in the crowd and among the Jewish leaders supported Jesus, and that the rest were manipulated by his opponents; that Jesus' opponents should not be made to look sinister while he and his friends are depicted in lighter tones, thus isolating Jesus and the apostles from the Jews as a group; that "if one cannot show beyond reasonable doubt that the particular Gospel element selected or paraphrased will not be offensive or have the potential for negative influence on the audience . . . , that element should not, in good conscience, be used"; and that Pontius Pilate should be presented as the "ruthless tyrant" that we know he was.

That the screenplay of *The Passion* violated the Conference's criteria in all these particulars was self-evident. But changing it to conform to the Conference's official positions would have required Gibson to start over from scratch, and there was no way he would accede to such a request. Instead, he took the offensive. One Catholic figure who supported him issued the preposterous statement that the screenplay did conform to established guidelines. Another declared that everything in the film was historically accurate. Spokesmen for the pro-

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ducers indicated that the film was a faithful presentation of the Gospel accounts, so that any criticism of the screenplay was a criticism of the Gospels themselves. Sympathetic commentators, including several Orthodox Jews, dutifully repeated these assertions, although very few of them had read the screenplay or seen the film.

AT THIS point in the controversy, I felt both sympathy and antipathy toward the arguments of Gibson's defenders. For two decades, I had publicly expressed strong reservations about the tendency of Jews engaged in interfaith dialogue to tell Christians what to believe about their own religion.[1] This same caveat had been issued in the 1960's, in the midst of the excitement surrounding the Vatican Council, by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the renowned Orthodox scholar, who was not only committed on principle to nonintervention but was also concerned about the dangers of reciprocal expectations. In general, it is because their own instincts enable them to empathize with the deep, unalterable convictions of fundamentalists that Orthodox Jews are particularly reluctant to propose revisions in the faith of others. By contrast, secularists, liberal Christians, and non-Orthodox religious Jews, even with the best of intentions, cannot quite grasp the full dimensions of an unwavering commitment to the literal truth of a sacred text.

Of course, the word "literal" is not subject to precise definition; but it is not without meaning, either. Thus, to argue (as some critics of *The Passion* have done) that Pontius Pilate could not have been successfully pressured by a Jewish mob is to argue that the Gospel accounts—all four of them—are incorrect. To argue that the Gospels contradict each other regarding the scourging of Jesus, with John placing it prior to the final decision to have him crucified and Matthew and Mark placing it later, is to misapprehend the approach of a fundamentalist, who will assert that he was scourged both before and after.

There is a fascinating irony in the understanding that many Orthodox Jews exhibit toward the sensibilities of the most traditional Christians. After all, the Orthodox retain deeper anti-Christian instincts than liberal Jews—avoiding interfaith prayer, shrinking from theological dialogue, affirming an ancient obligation to undergo martyrdom rather than embrace Christianity, and in many cases seeing Christian anti-Semitism as a metaphysical, unchangeable condition captured in the formula, "Esau hates Jacob." And yet, several Orthodox Jews have gone so far as to ask me whether even hostile non-Scriptural material in *The Passion* may be justified in light of authoritative Catholic traditions. I doubt that this question would even enter the mind of the non-Orthodox.

Beyond empathy with believers who resist the questioning of Scriptural accuracy, many traditionalist Jews feel a commonality with traditionalist Christians on a range of other issues as well: abortion, sexuality in the public sphere, homosexuality, aid to denominational schools, protection of religious rights, and the claim of Jews to the land of Israel in its entirety. Lengthy tracts could be written to qualify the simplistic, homogenizing implications of this list, but it does help explain the fact that Gibson's most enthusiastic Jewish defenders have come from the ranks of the Orthodox. This is not to say, however, that a majority of Orthodox Jews think that the film is a good idea. Quite the contrary: Gibson's apologists among the Orthodox are far outnumbered by those typified, in extreme fashion, by a relative who told me that once this movie appeared he would be careful not to stand close to the edge of a subway platform. What the apologists and the fearful straphangers do have in common is a tendency to regard vigorous Jewish *criticism* of the film as incendiary and self-defeating.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. While I strongly believe that Jews should not instruct Christians about the proper parameters of Christian faith, I do not regard alleged faithfulness to the Gospel narratives as a valid defense of a decision to present those narratives without elaboration or nuance. In a newspaper piece that appeared well before the film's release, I put the point as follows:

> The pre-modern Catholic Church—and Gibson is after all an unreconstructed Catholic who pines for the good old days—actively discouraged any reading of Scripture by the laity. While few people today would endorse this approach, it reflects the healthy understanding that the text of Scripture cannot stand alone. It needs to be explicated—and not by the proverbial Devil so famous for quoting it. Gibson and his defenders imagine that the film's adherence to the words of the Gospels with nothing added provides their most effective defense. In fact, along with the sadism and gore, it is precisely what justifies severe indictment.

[1] See my "Jewish-Christian Relations: A Jewish Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies 20* (1983), and my articles on *Dominus Iesus*, *Dabru Emet*, and "Confrontation," posted on the website of Boston College's Center for Christian-Jewish Learning (www.bc.edu/cjlearning).

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In short, respect for the power and history of this story requires that it be placed in a framework that elucidates its message in light of the teachings of contemporary mainstream Christianity, Catholic and Protestant alike.

IN THE months leading up to the film's release, the war of words intensified, and with it, the anticipation. The most vocal Jewish attacks came from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), whose leader, Abraham Foxman, became the prime target of both Gibsonites and anti-anti-Gibsonites. In the wake of intense criticism and a more realistic assessment of potential consequences, the ADL moderated its rhetoric. But the damage could not be entirely undone.

This episode deserves a brief comment, if only because it continues to provoke debate. Although the decibel level of the ADL's initial reaction was clearly a serious misjudgment, other factors need to be taken into consideration. First, the organization did try to act behind the scenes, but encountered a stone wall. Second, some of Gibson's rhetoric, as well as his apparent doubts concerning the large-scale gassing of Jews by the Nazis in World War II, understandably raised Jewish hackles. Third, it was evident early on that his assertions about the absolute fidelity of the film to the Gospels were questionable. Finally, and despite what some of Foxman's detractors implied, this movie would hardly have disappeared into the void had the ADL and others kept silent. Although its success would almost certainly have been more limited, Gibson's name, the technical quality of the production, the mobilization of the evangelical and traditionalist Catholic communities, and the intrinsic significance of the story to countless multitudes would have guaranteed a very wide viewership throughout the world and for many years to come.

In any event, when Ash Wednesday 2004 finally arrived, the film's reception rapidly demonstrated the near irrelevance of the framework within which much of the earlier discussion had taken place. Did viewers base their reaction to *The Passion* on the degree of its deviation from the criteria established by the Bishops' Conference? The very question is comical. While the earlier debate did alert filmgoers to the specter of anti-Semitism, the vast majority reacted through the filter of their religious commitments. To the degree that the movie was evaluated against some other standard, that standard turned out to be—other movies.

Thus, the question raised was not whether Gibson's depiction was "better" or "worse" than that of the Oberammergau passion play, or of the Gospels themselves, but whether it was more or less violent than *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. That film, which I have mercifully never seen, has become a main point of comparison in traditionalist Christian discourse about *The Passion*, to the extent that it was invoked by a twelve-year-old preacher interviewed on Fox News who, I hope, has also not seen it. In a similar vein, many fundamentalist Christians have pointedly wondered why secular commentators have fallen silent at best and been supportive at worst when it comes to gangsta rap and other abhorrent manifestations of popular culture while subjecting a film about Jesus to withering attack.

This argument, for all its force, is persuasive only as an ad-hominem riposte (and, as we shall see, it can be easily reversed). Nonetheless, it is of central importance in explaining the emotions unleashed by criticism of the film. Since I empathize with some of those emotions, let me try to formulate the key points as vigorously as I can.

Straightforward logic and elementary intuition inform us that books, films, songs, theater, and art can exercise a profound influence over readers, listeners, and viewers. And yet, out of ideological or financial motives, intelligent people have regularly delivered themselves of the most transparent absurdities regarding this matter. Producers of violent or pornographic films tell us that what happens on screen is not transmuted into actual behavior, an assertion that, while surely true for most viewers, is unquestionably false for a nontrivial minority. Distributors of gangsta rap assert with straight faces that the unspeakably vile lyrics of the songs they disseminate reflect a regrettable reality but surely do not exacerbate it. After all, they intone, no listener, whatever his age, would ever dream of actually carrying out any of the horrific acts that the songs explicitly encourage—and besides, it is not the responsibility of these pillars of society but rather the obligation of parents to monitor every piece of music to which their children are exposed.

The most vigorous critics of this debased ethos and its products have been traditionalist Christians. For their efforts, they have been pilloried for narrowness, intolerance, and worse. When, for example, a dung-splattered Mary appeared in an exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, their objections were dismissed not just on First Amendment grounds but on the supposed principle that it is the *task* of a museum to exhibit "cutting-edge" art. Not surprisingly, unequivocal moral support for Christian con-

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cerns came predominantly from Orthodox Jewish organizations.

It was pent-up grievances of this kind that exploded in traditionalist Christian circles in the face of attacks on the film by secularist liberals—attacks that often extended to Christian conservatives themselves. Here, for example, was Stuart Klawans in the *Nation*:

> However much you might play at seeing his work as just another movie, Gibson has gone outside the normal bounds of show business and into the territory of America's religious absolutists: John Ashcroft anointing himself with oil, gay-hating lawmakers attempting to write Leviticus into the Constitution, antiabortionists shooting to kill, generals declaring holy war against the Muslim infidel. Our country has a great, great many such people who do not consider their convictions to be open to discussion. They maintain a significant hold on power; and since a lot of them have an antinomian streak, I doubt the rule of law would stand in their way, should we manage to loosen their grip. The ever-boyish and ingenuous Gibson, with his simple faith, has made *The Passion of the Christ* as a gift to such people.

To retain one's equanimity in the face of such rhetoric is no easy task. Nonetheless, grievances do not provide a license to suspend one's own moral code. It is decidedly true that people who routinely ignore the damage that popular culture can cause, who wrap themselves in the First Amendment to guard against the need to think seriously about the consequences of music and films, and who then speak of the dangers inherent in *The Passion*, may justly be denounced as hypocrites. But so can those who routinely rail against the dangers of popular culture and then turn a blind eye to this film's brutality and its potential for harm.

To speak repeatedly about the psychological damage to children who are exposed to cinematic violence, and then take high-school classes to see *The Passion*, is problematic in the extreme; perhaps, indeed, a form of child abuse. (It should be unnecessary to add that peer pressure strips the option to stay home of any meaning.) In assessing the potential consequences of popular culture, traditionalist Christians do not ask if those attending a rap concert will seek out women to rape immediately upon leaving the theater. Similarly, the question of whether crowds will pour out of multiplexes to initiate immediate pogroms is hardly the proper criterion for evaluating the potential effect of *The Passion* on attitudes toward Jews. Those who understand the power of films to mold behavior, and who worry about their impact upon even a minority of susceptible viewers, should be the first to recognize the danger.

FINALLY, THEN, we turn to the message of the film itself. I do not believe *The Passion* was made with the purpose of arousing or increasing hostility to Jews, but it exudes indifference to this prospect. The litany of its anti-Jewish motifs, many of them not required by the Gospel accounts and sometimes even standing in tension with them, is lengthy and impressive. No filmmaker who actually cared about avoiding anti-Semitism could have produced anything resembling it.

To begin with, the high priest and his wicked associates wear costumes that evoke contemporary prayer shawls. They are bedecked with precious metals. Judas's thirty pieces of silver are thrown to him in slow motion; they scatter on the floor, and he greedily picks them up. The Jewish boys who pursue Judas are transformed into little demons—the metaphoric progeny, as Andrew Sullivan has noted, of Satan himself (or herself), who flits menacingly among the Jewish crowds.

In describing Jesus' arrest by Jews armed with swords and staves, the Gospels themselves simply assert that he was led away—in John, bound and led away—to the Jewish authorities. In *The Passion*, he is beaten vigorously and repeatedly during his forced march to the point where he falls off a cliff, is brought to a sudden halt by the chain around his neck, and must then clamber back up. It is not enough to remark that the Gospels tell us nothing of the sort. It strains credulity to believe that the Gospel writers could have known of such extreme mistreatment without allowing the slightest hint of it to enter their accounts.[2]

Once Jesus is delivered to the high priest and his associates, the Gospels do speak of his being buffeted, spat on, and slapped after or just before his condemnation. Here too, though, the depiction in the film is much stronger than that of the Gospels. Then, when he is handed over to Pilate, the sensitive Roman governor of the movie asks: "Do you always punish your prisoners before they are judged?" This question, which does not appear in

[2] "And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest" (Matthew 26:57); "And they laid their hands on him, and took him. . . . And they led Jesus away to the high priest" (Mark 14:46, 53); "Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house" (Luke 22:54); "Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus and bound him, and led him away" (John 18:12-13).

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the Gospels, is left unanswered, but its implications are unambiguous. If the Jews behave this way as a matter of course, they are routinely vicious; if not, they have singled Jesus out for special cruelty.

And so we come to Pilate. Before seeing the film, I had vigorously defended the right of believing Christians to affirm that Pilate was reluctant to execute Jesus but was successfully pressured by a Jewish crowd to override his own preference. I continue to adhere to that position in principle, but the film has impelled me to moderate it. The inner struggle ascribed to the morally conflicted governor goes beyond what the Gospels require, and its inconsistency with what we know about this man's character from extra-biblical sources becomes a legitimate basis for criticism.

In the context of the film, Pilate's (biblically unattested) complaints to his wife about the rotten outpost to which he has been assigned and the stinking rabble that he must deal with appear eminently reasonable. The viewer, then, is led to identify with a perspective that sees Judea and its undifferentiated population, taken as a whole, through the prism of this bloodthirsty crowd. Pilate's moment of discomfort while viewing the lashing his men inflict on Jesus—a reaction also unrecorded in the Gospels—forms an acute contrast with the unmoved cruelty of the Jews. In still another scene, both unbiblical and implausible, Pilate attempts but fails to quiet the crowd, whereupon the high priest sarcastically asks—to appreciative laughter—if they have no respect for the Roman governor. Thus, the Jewish crowd does more than manipulate Pilate; it subjects him to open mockery.

Finally, in a controversial scene that is indeed in one of the Gospels, Pilate washes his hands of guilt, and the crowd apparently exclaims, "His blood be on us and on our children." I say "apparently" because Gibson has, in a fit of philo-Semitism, removed the subtitle at this point, and, as he told Diane Sawyer, the Aramaic exclamation is partially obscured by other noise. (I heard the Aramaic "His blood be on us," but could not make out the curse on the children; since Gibson has indicated that it is there, I am prepared to take his word for it.)[3]

There is, in any case, no realistic way to prevent the addition of the relevant subtitle in English, in Arabic, or in any other language, as the film makes its way through the world, through the years, and through a variety of electronic formats. This is a paradigmatic example of a passage that a Christian has every right to believe but no right to present in such a film without some dialogue expressing a disavowal of the sentiment by figures with whom the audience will identify. Yes, the crowd said it; but God, for one, did not agree with it. Jesus' later, generic "Father, forgive them" does not begin to suffice.

AT THIS point we must screw up our courage to examine the scourging and all the rest. For the last hour and fifteen minutes or so, this is a film depicting a man beaten to a bloody pulp and then nailed to a cross. In another controversial choice, Gibson here endorses John's account of the scourging of Jesus on Pilate's orders before the final cries of "Crucify him, crucify him." I have already noted my defense of Gibson's right to make such a choice, but once again the film impelled me to qualify my position. The relevant verses in John—in their entirety—read only as follows: "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and they smote him with their hands" (John 19:1-3). Out of this raw material, there emerge ten almost unrelieved minutes of unremitting whipping with implements of varying cruelty, leaving Jesus a welter of blood.

Since no one could have stood erect or perhaps even lived after such treatment, it is self-evident that the scene is untrue to the intent of the Gospel. What this means is that the subsequent scene, in which the Jews have one more opportunity to change their mind, takes on a dimension that even the admittedly harsh Gospel account does not convey. The crowd now beholds a man who has visibly been subjected to unspeakable torment. The rabbis of the Mishnah say that Jews are "merciful people descended from merciful people." Not here. Not a fleeting scintilla of mercy. "Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!"

So Pilate sends him off to be crucified. At this point, direct responsibility for the violence shifts entirely to the Romans. And here in large measure is the basis for my tentative assertion earlier that Gibson did not intend to foment hostility toward Jews as such. I am referring to the consistent bestiality of the Roman soldiers, plus a few small but significant positive indicators of another kind.

The sadism of the Romans underscores Gibson's consuming desire to maximize the depiction of

[3] Considering the effort that went into preparing an Aramaic script and teaching it to the actors, the errors in pronunciation reflect a startling degree of sloppiness. To cite but one example in a very important word, the high priest pronounces the word "messiah," more than once, in a grotesque conflation of Hebrew and Aramaic (*meshiaha*).

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Jesus' torment and to highlight the contrast between the evil forces of the film's villains and the pure, self-sacrificing goodness of Jesus and his followers. When evil is embodied in Jews, they are depicted in the worst possible light; when it is embodied in Romans, *they* are.

FOR GIBSON, who was raised in an anti-Semitic household, the images of avaricious, bloodthirsty, gold-bedecked Jewish monsters are no doubt standard means of symbolizing Jewish evil, and may be used with no concern whatsoever for their larger impact. Perhaps, just perhaps, he really does not understand what some of his clearly decent defenders also do not understand—that the depiction of Jewish monsters has a potential for evil consequences that the depiction of Roman monsters does not. It should not be necessary to make an argument for this assertion, but apparently it is.

We have been assured that, just as there is no reason to suppose the film will cause hatred for Italians, there is no reason to suppose it should cause hatred for Jews. The differences, however, are numerous and compelling. The Roman soldiers are not the leaders of their people; the high priest and his associates are. The depiction of the Romans does not reinforce a hostile stereotype that has persisted over centuries; the depiction of the Jews does. The Italians atoned for their sin by embracing Christianity; the Jews did not. There is no history of persecution directed against Italians as a consequence of this story; there is a history of persecution—a long and bloody one—against Jews. There is no longstanding theological argument for punishing Italians for their role in these events; there is a deeply influential one for punishing Jews. No non-Jewish Italian has ever been called "Christ killer" while suffering a beating at the hands of classmates or mobs; Jews—Italian and otherwise—have lived through this experience, and sometimes failed to live through it, on countless occasions from medieval times through the 20th century.

Even on a purely cinematic level, a profound difference obtains. The Romans in the movie are "innocently" sadistic. They simply enjoy smashing bones, scourging flesh, making blood flow. They cannot help it; it is their animal nature. The Jews, by contrast, are villainous out of conviction; theirs is a thoroughly conscious, thoroughly intentional, thoroughly satanic evil. There is a distinction, and Gibson cannot but make it palpable even if he does not consciously mean to.[4]

Why, then, am I still inclined to see the Roman monsters as an indication that Gibson's assault on Jews in this film results not from intentional anti-Jewish malice but from a Manichaean vision reinforced by the anti-Semitic stereotypes that he imbibed with his father's milk? What nudges me in this direction is the presence of a few touches that are inconsistent with systematic anti-Semitism.

The most striking of these is a single word spoken by a Roman soldier to Simon of Cyrene, the Jew forced to help Jesus carry the cross. Simon himself is depicted more sympathetically than the Gospels require; when he asks the Romans to show Jesus some mercy, a soldier dismisses him with the epithet, "Jew." Here, then, the film underscores the Jewishness of a sympathetic character where the Gospels do not.

Another such touch appears in the very brief flashback to the Sermon on the Mount, where some of those present wear prayer shawls, thus reminding us of the Jewishness of Jesus' followers. While these tiny flourishes do not even begin to neutralize the extended anti-Jewish motifs and images at the core of the film, they do not sit well with the assumption that it was made with the conscious purpose of fomenting hatred against Jews.

For me, an unexpected consequence of watching this movie was a new regard for the Gospel writers' restraint. Gibson shows us the interminable beating of Jesus as he carries his cross to the crucifixion. We have already seen that John asserts in but a single unelaborated verse that Jesus was scourged before his final conviction. In Luke, there is no scourging at all. The only references to scourging after Pilate's final decision appear in Matthew and Mark, and in each case the information is contained in the briefest of subordinate clauses: "and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified" (Matthew 27:26); "and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified" (Mark 15:15). That is all.

Since the flogging implied here is no small matter, and might well have merited greater emphasis, it appears that the Gospel writers consciously marginalized this element of the story, that they did not want the sacrifice of Jesus to turn into a horror movie. In light of this, the very core of Gibson's film—which reflects his conviction that, in order to appreciate Jesus' sacrifice, one must wallow in his agony—runs counter to the intentions of the Gospels.

Pondering this point, I have come to understand why a Catholic priest who has been prominently involved in ecumenical activities both in the United States and in Rome told me before the film was re-

[4] I am indebted to Neal Kozodoy for the point made in this paragraph.

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leased that its reported concentration on the flaying of Jesus was in his view blasphemous.

IT IS no surprise that the early reactions to showings of *The Passion* should have mirrored the positions held before it was released. Nonetheless, they have been instructive and occasionally troubling.

The scholars who criticized the early screenplay, Christian and Jewish, reaffirmed their first assessment. Since the film was not changed in any fundamental way, this was inevitable. As for Catholics of a traditional bent, most embraced the film enthusiastically. Thus, William Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, described it in an open letter to the Jewish community as "magnificent beyond words." Anyone who subscribes to the notion of collective guilt, Donohue wrote, or who believes that today's Jews are responsible for the behavior of some Jews 2,000 years ago, is demented.

Since not many people are insane, Donohue's remark was clearly intended to reassure, as well as to reinforce his denunciation of the film's critics. Unfortunately, however, the Catholic teaching that all sinners are responsible for the crucifixion was once seen as perfectly consistent with the doctrine that the Jewish collective, and the Jewish collective alone, suffered specific, grave, and ongoing punishment for its role. Although it is a comfort to know that Donohue, a mainstream Catholic holding a responsible position, cannot even conceive of the rationality of this position, still, the "demented" view was held by major Church authorities through the ages and by masses of Catholics even in the United States through the mid-20th century, and its permanent demise can hardly be celebrated with confidence.

I was particularly interested in seeing the official review of the movie by the USCCB's Office of Film and Broadcasting. It was no doubt to be expected that the movie's great popularity among the laity would affect the positions of Catholic leaders, and so it did. While the review contains some mild criticisms, it is on the whole laudatory; more to the point, it contains not a single reference to the "Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion."

Michael J. Cook, one of the Jewish scholars involved in the original evaluation of the screenplay, has seen this as no less vexing than the movie itself. "The solid bridge of trust Jews thought they had with the Catholic Church now lies exposed as merely a drawbridge, readily placed in raised position when it is most needed." My own emotional reaction is identical to Cook's; no measure of internal communal dynamics can justify this betrayal of decades of Catholic-Jewish dialogue. But if Donohue's view is too rosy, Cook's may be too despairing. In moments of crisis, ecumenical work can indeed be ignored in favor of larger concerns, but the quotidian activity of ecumenists effects slow, gradual, deep change. The most fervent partisans of this movie have couched their defense as a denial that it blames the Jews. Two generations ago, certainly three generations ago, Jewish responsibility was taken for granted.

And evangelical Christians? Despite the Catholic provenance of the movie, and despite its concentration on themes that Protestants have historically deemphasized, these denominations have embraced it with unbridled enthusiasm—to the point of construing criticism of "Mel's" work as enmity toward them and their values. In fact, a de-facto alliance between fundamentalist Protestants and traditional Catholics has developed around the movie, with consequences that are difficult to foresee.

Because uncritical devotion to the film has become a virtual religious obligation for them, fundamentalist Christians regularly attest that it is entirely faithful to the biblical account. Interviewing Rabbi Daniel Lapin, the most outspoken and uncompromising Jewish apologist for Gibson, Rev. Pat Robertson asked, "What is the story here [regarding Abraham Foxman's criticism]? This movie is anything but anti-Semitic. It is the four Gospels that Christians believe is inspired Scripture. There is nothing that is departing from this narrative." To which the rabbi responded: "It is breathtakingly arrogant. What he is saying is that the only way to escape the wrath of Foxman is to repudiate your faith."

Similarly, Patrick J. Buchanan, serving as guest host on the MSNBC program *Scarborough Country*, asked Rev. Franklin Graham whether it is not the case that the film "is extraordinarily faithful to the Gospels." The reply: "Of course, Mel has a little bit of Hollywood artistry in the film. But it's very accurate . . . it's extremely close." Buchanan then posed a similar question to James Kennedy, described as the most widely watched Presbyterian minister in the country: "Could Gibson have portrayed it any other way and remained faithful to the Gospels?" Kennedy replied: "[W]ith a few tiny little dramatic licenses that he added, no, he could not have, because that's the way the story goes."

Thus have the culture wars impelled biblical literalists to display so little concern for the Gospel

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accounts that major deviations and invented scenes, to say nothing of the larger vision transforming the narrative into a bloodbath, become "tiny little dramatic licenses."

The nastiest vignette so far appeared a bit later in Buchanan's program, when he interviewed Rabbi Shmuley Boteach in the presence of Revs. Graham and Kennedy. In an effort to trap the rabbi into declaring that Jesus was a charlatan, Buchanan began by asking, "Do you believe Christ rose from the dead?" The rabbi had to reply in the negative, but made a point of adding that he considered Jesus to have been a devout Jew. Buchanan proceeded to ask: "If he was a devout Jew, why did he, in effect, say that before Abraham was, I am, and in effect say, 'I am the messiah'? And as a consequence of what he said, he not only laid down his life, but others laid down their lives. Now, if he was not the son of God, how can he be a good man if he sent men to their deaths on behalf of something that was not true?"

In other words, a Jew has no choice but to regard Jesus as less than a good man. This was a despicable attempt to foment religious enmity, and in Buchanan's case it may even have been more than that: an effort to create discord between Jews and evangelical Christians in the hope of weakening the support that the evangelical community has extended to Israel. This, after all, has been a major stumbling block to Buchanan's ability to achieve agreement with evangelicals across a broad range of issues.

Whether or not that was Buchanan's intent—and I put nothing past him—this same issue is also at the heart of Jewish concerns about the dangers of criticizing *The Passion*. To be sure, some liberal Jews—liberal in both the political and religious sense—are deeply ambivalent about the alliance established with the evangelical community regarding Israel, and welcome the opportunity to disengage. But more conservative Jews regard evangelical support for Israel as a virtual lifeline, valuable in and of itself and especially crucial at a moment when that community forms a key constituency for a conservative Republican administration in Washington. Many Jews worry that the moderate, potential danger posed by *The Passion* has been allowed to outweigh the acute and present danger that currently confronts the Jewish people—and who is to say that they are wrong?

THIS BRINGS us back to the thesis with which I began: the battles over this film have struck deep and dangerous chords. Reflecting and intensifying old antagonisms, they have pitted conservative Christians against liberal ones and religious fundamentalists against secularists. They have divided Jews along both familiar and unfamiliar lines, forcing them to confront the paradoxes of their current engagement with the Christian world: a world in which fundamentalists who work to convert them in order to prevent their otherwise likely (or certain) damnation extend desperately needed support to Israel, while many religious liberals, recognizing the ongoing value of Judaism and sensitive to manifestations of old-style Christian anti-Semitism, vehemently denounce almost any efforts by Israel, no matter how manifestly necessary, to defend its citizens against mass murder at the hands of terrorists.

In the face of the deep emotions stirred by this controversy, the challenge of maintaining a posture of measured criticism is especially daunting. In the Jewish case, total suppression of criticism would not only constitute a craven abandonment of self-respect; it would betray Christian friends who have devoted much of their lives to the welfare of the Jewish people. But neither can criticism be allowed, on either side, to descend into self-righteous condemnation of all who disagree.

If amity is to prevail, traditionalist Christians will have to force themselves to understand that reasonable people have grounds for genuine concern about this movie, that its critics do not necessarily hate them, and that some like them very much indeed. Jews for their part will have to force themselves to recognize that the fervent embrace of the film by traditionalist Christian audiences is not necessarily a sign of hostility or even indifference toward them, that it emerges out of positive religious emotions as well as understandable resentments flowing from the demonization of the religious Right by influential sectors of American public opinion. Jews must also force themselves to continue tending ecumenical vineyards even as the limitations of previous achievements have become painfully evident.

The reservoirs of good will that have been painstakingly accumulated in the last generation are being sorely tested. They cannot be allowed to run dry.

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The Richard Clarke Show

Joshua Muravchik

In March of this year, a hitherto unheralded book threatened (or, depending on your point of view, promised) to turn the 2004 presidential election on its head. The author was Richard Clarke, a career government official who had served as chief of counterterrorism under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. The book, *Against All Enemies*,[1] accused Bush of having failed the nation grievously on the very issue on which the President's case for a second term would inevitably rest—namely, his response to the threat to the nation's security that manifested itself so terrifyingly in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

The book's release date had been pushed forward to coincide with public hearings held by the government commission appointed to probe the 9/11 catastrophe. Stoked by Clarke's appearance as a witness, which he opened with a dramatic apology to the victims' kin for the government's failure to forestall the attack, *Against All Enemies* became overnight the publishing event of the season. Predictably, Clarke's agent soon announced that he was fielding bids for movie rights.

Both in the book and in his testimony, as in his numerous television appearances, Clarke charged that Bush, far from being an effective leader in the battle against terrorism, had stubbornly ignored this looming menace during his first eight months in office, even as Clarke, then in the White House himself, struggled in vain to draw the President's attention to it. When 9/11 did galvanize Bush belatedly to action, he proceeded to ruin the job by invading Iraq, pursuing a war on which the President was "hell-bent" for his own parochial reasons but which, Clarke was convinced, would make America less, not more, secure.

The effect of Clarke's words was, everyone agreed, electric. Few political observers differed with the assessment of the Washington correspondents of the *Los Angeles Times*: "The consensus here is that Clarke's recently published book and his testimony before the September 11 commission have dealt the Bush presidency its most severe blow to date." The liberal advocacy group MoveOn.org announced that it had raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to air anti-Bush TV spots based on Clarke's allegations.

In view of the magnitude of Clarke's challenge to the reputation of the Bush team, top administration officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and especially National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, took a direct hand in rebuttal. This, in turn, evoked cries of indignation from Democrats and media commentators. The *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert deplored what he termed a "fero-

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[1] The subtitle is "Inside America's War on Terror." Free Press, 304 pp., $27.00.

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cious and unconscionable campaign of character assassination against Mr. Clarke." The *Washington Post*'s David Ignatius claimed that the administration had "smeared Clarke personally [and] ignored his substantive criticisms." His *Post* colleague, Richard Cohen, wrote that a broadside against Clarke by Senate majority leader Bill Frist reminded him of "Joe McCarthy." And Tom Daschle, the Senate's minority leader, demanded an end to the "character attacks" on Clarke.

What made Clarke's indictment of Bush particularly devastating, and the controversy over it so heated, was his contention that Bush's performance against terrorism compared very unfavorably with that of his predecessor, Bill Clinton. Since Clarke had served both men, he was presumably well positioned to judge. Even more telling was the fact that, as a career official who had also served in the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, Clarke had a reputation as something of a "hawk." If his case were to hold up, then Bush's credit as a wartime leader would be canceled, and with it the Republicans' claim to be the party better trusted to safeguard the nation against its foes.

It is only because events move so quickly these days that I have thus far been writing in the past tense. Conceivably, Richard Clarke himself will fade from the scene as suddenly as he emerged. But whether he fades or not, the case advanced in *Against All Enemies*, and echoes of that case, are bound to haunt our political debate for a long time.

Here, then, is the essence of the case. Clarke writes that he briefed the top officials of the incoming Bush administration during its first days. "My message was stark," he states. "Al Qaeda is at war with us, it is a highly capable organization, probably with sleeper cells in the U.S., and it is clearly planning a major series of attacks against us; we must act decisively and quickly." But no action ensued. Told that bin Laden had a network of "sleeper cells" around the world, including in the U.S., Condoleezza Rice "looked skeptical." Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz wondered "why we are . . . talking about this one man, bin Laden," and when Clarke responded by likening bin Laden's verbal threats against the United States to Hitler's threats in *Mein Kampf*, Wolfowitz (says Clarke) grew testy about comparisons with the Holocaust.

The only result of Clarke's entreaties was that he himself was demoted, and given the much smaller portfolio of countering cyberterrorism. Meanwhile, by late June, both he and CIA director George Tenet "were convinced that a major series of attacks was about to come." But Tenet expected the venue to be Israel or Saudi Arabia; Clarke alone foresaw that it would come on American soil. Indeed, he gave Rice "a checklist of things to do after an attack, in part to underline my belief that something big was coming and that we needed to go on the offensive." Finally, on September 4, 2001, eight months after taking office and only a week before the World Trade Center towers would be reduced to rubble, the administration adopted a comprehensive plan to combat terrorists.

If Bush had evaded the terrorism question until too late, his performance after 9/11 was no less blameworthy. Clarke explains:

> He had a unique opportunity to unite America, to bring the United States together with allies around the world to fight terrorism and hate, to eliminate al Qaeda, to eliminate our vulnerabilities, to strengthen important nations threatened by radicalism. He did none of these things. He invaded Iraq.

Indeed, says Clarke, on the very morrow of 9/11 Bush delivered to his intelligence and terrorism staff "a very intimidating message which said, 'Iraq. Give me a memo about Iraq and 9/11.' It was very clear . . . that he wanted to see that there was a connection." Dutifully, Clarke assigned a subordinate to reexamine the question of a possible connection between al Qaeda and Iraq; but, just as he had anticipated, "all agencies and departments agreed, there was no cooperation between the two."

This reality, however, did not make so much as a dent on Bush and his top advisers. The Iraqi threat "was an idée fixe, a rigid belief, received wisdom, a decision already made and one that no fact or event could derail." As Bob Herbert, drawing on Clarke, would sum it up in the *New York Times*: "The President wanted war with Iraq, and ultimately he would have his war."

Bush's obsession not only led to the needless death of hundreds of Americans and thousands of others, it was also a disaster for the goal of stemming terrorism:

> Nothing America could have done would have provided al Qaeda and its new generation of cloned groups a better recruitment device than our unprovoked invasion of an oil-rich Arab country. Nothing else could have so well negated all our other positive acts and so closed Muslim eyes and ears to our subsequent calls for reform in their region. It was as if Osama bin Laden, hidden in some high mountain redoubt, were engaging in long-range

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mind control of George Bush, chanting "invade Iraq, you must invade Iraq."

TO GRASP the full delinquency of Bush's Neroesque record before 9/11, Clark invites us to contrast it with that of Bill Clinton, his previous boss. Clinton, he writes, "had seen earlier than anyone that terrorism would be the major new threat facing America." By 1994, "the Clinton team, from the President down, was seized with the issue." And "by the beginning of 1996 they were preoccupied with it." In 1998,

> Clinton . . . asked [National Security Adviser Samuel] Berger to pull together an overall plan to deal with al Qaeda. "Listen, retaliating for [specific] attacks is all well and good, but we gotta get rid of these guys once and for all," Clinton said, looking seriously over his half-glasses at Tenet, [Secretary of Defense William] Cohen, and Berger, "You understand what I'm telling you?"

The next year, convening other top officials to discuss bin Laden, Berger told them: "I spoke with the President and he wants you all to know . . . this is it, nothing more important, all assets. We stop this f---er." This, Clarke cannot help observing wistfully, "was the sort of attention we needed in the summer of 2001" from the Bush crowd, but did not get.

Clarke anticipates a likely objection: how was it that, despite the Clintonites' preoccupation and all those forthright words and gazes, the terrorism problem was still there for the Bush team to bungle in 2001? He has an explanation: Clinton was hamstrung by the right wing. When, for example, he ordered cruise-missile strikes on Afghanistan and Sudan in 1998, at a moment coinciding with the peak of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, "it quickly became grist for the right-wing talk radio mill and part of the Get Clinton campaign. That reaction made it more difficult to get approval for follow-up attacks on al Qaeda."

An additional but related obstacle, Clarke asserts, was presented by FBI director Louis Freeh. Although Freeh was a Clinton appointee, his "back channels to Republicans in the Congress and to supporters in the media made it impossible for the President to dismiss him without running the risk of making him a martyr of the Republican Right." Nor was the FBI the only impediment. Because Clinton, determined though he was, had been "weakened by continued political attack," he "could not get the CIA, the Pentagon, and FBI to act sufficiently to deal with the threat."

Nevertheless, such were Clinton's instincts and even his actions that, had he been in office after 9/11, he would have performed much better than Bush. He surely would not to have made the unpardonable error of going to war against Iraq. Instead, as Clarke pictures it, Clinton (and probably, he says, our other recent Presidents, too, except for Ronald Reagan) would have had a better plan:

> [They] might have tried to understand the phenomenon of terrorism, what led fifteen Saudis and four others to commit suicide to kill Americans. [Clinton or the] others might have tried to build a world consensus to address the root causes, while using the moment to force what had been lethargic or doubting governments to arrest known terrorists and close front organizations. One can imagine Clinton trying to force an Israeli-Palestinian settlement, going to Saudi Arabia and addressing the Muslim people in a moving appeal for religious tolerance, pushing hard for a security arrangement between India and Pakistan to create a nuclear-free zone, and stabilizing Pakistan.

In short, when it comes to the challenge of terrorism, the changeover from Clinton to Bush amounted to a national tragedy.

BEFORE ASSESSING Clarke's analysis, a few words are in order about this book as a book, and what that tells us about Clarke's method and general reliability. *Against All Enemies* has two heroes. The first is Clinton. The former President comes off as a kind of John Wayne figure. He is tough as nails not only on bin Laden and al Qaeda but also in facing whatever other challenges confronted the United States during his tenure.

Thus, when informed of early signs that Iran was behind the bombing of U.S. military housing in Dahran, Saudi Arabia, "Clinton told us that if it came to using force against Iran, 'I don't want any pissant half-measures.'" Presented with a plan for a cruise-missile strike against Iraqi intelligence headquarters in response to Iraq's 1993 effort to assassinate former President George H. W. Bush, "Clinton was pragmatic. 'Well, this may teach him a lesson, but if it doesn't, we will have to do more.'" And when followers of Muhammad Farah Aideed killed eighteen U.S. army rangers in the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, Clinton, although he duly convened the members of his cabinet and let them have their say, "had already decided something. He was done listening." Masterfully, the President laid down the plan:

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> Okay, here's what we're gonna do. We are not running away with our tail between our legs. I've already heard from Congress and that's what they all want to do, get out tomorrow. We're staying. . . .
>
> We are going to send in more troops, with tanks and aircraft and anything else they need. We are going to show force. And we are going to keep delivering the food. If anybody f---s with us, we will respond massively.

Yet, like John Wayne, Clinton could also show a caring heart. When, in 1996, TWA 800 exploded in mid-air and the families of its passengers gathered in New York's Kennedy airport, Clinton

> called us into the Oval Office. "I want to go up there tomorrow, to see those families."
>
> That did not seem the best idea I had ever heard. The families were looking to lynch someone. If the president of TWA was unavailable, they might settle for the President of the United States.
>
> I suggested there might be a problem with meeting the families in their current mood. . . .
>
> "Get a French interpreter too. Many of the families are from France," the President continued as though I had never objected.

Nor are strength and compassion Clinton's only virtues. He had had the wisdom to appoint Attorney General Janet Reno, a woman of "incredible public courage." And he is a man of depth: "Clinton's reading habits had always amazed me. He was an eclectic reader, who apparently stayed up very late almost every night devouring a book."

But if Clarke's portrayal of Clinton leans toward the hagiographic, the book's other hero comes across as, if anything, more admirable still. His name is Richard Clarke.

When important things affecting U.S. security were happening, Clarke, it seems, was nearly ubiquitous. We see him as puppeteer, cleverly manipulating Vice President Al Gore's whip hand to force an inert bureaucracy into safeguarding the Atlanta Olympics; as executive, dispatching teams of experts to see to the protection of U.S. embassies around the world; as diplomat, telling Clinton what to write to the king of Saudi Arabia; as wordsmith, contributing passages to "the most eloquent speech of [George W. Bush's] career."

There is more. Clarke the moralist single-handedly shames Israel into ceasing weapons deals with South Africa by confronting Israeli official David Ivry with the realization that apartheid "is a sin." Clarke the master tactician plots the caper that turns up proof of Iraq's nuclear-weapons program. Above all, there is Clarke the consummate doer and shaker, whose influence extends far beyond his portfolio. It is he who recommends General Barry McCaffrey for the post of drug czar, and he who (together with some others) recommends the appointment of General John Shalikashvili as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It is even Clarke who enters into "a pact" with Madeleine Albright and a few others, called "Operation Orient Express," to oust Boutros Boutros-Ghali as Secretary-General of the UN.

Given the breadth of his influence, and his qualities of both insight and foresight, it is little wonder that Clarke is esteemed so highly—as we learn from the things he tells us have been said to and about him by others. When the Clinton administration gave way to the Bush administration, a top outgoing Pentagon official, concerned about the Counterterrorism Security Group that Clarke headed, appealed to incoming Secretary of State Colin Powell: "Keep this interagency team together. . . . [T]his is the best interagency team I have ever seen." On 9/11 itself, a day when Clarke, in his own telling, took command of the government's response, the President's Special Assistant for Defense Affairs "squeezed my bicep" and said: "Guess I'm working for you today. What can I do?" Shortly thereafter, an FBI official responded to an order from Clarke, adding: "Dick . . . hang in there, we need you." Hours later, President Bush gave his handlers two commands: "I'm coming back to the White House as soon as the plane is fueled. No discussion. Item two, briefing by Dick Clarke."

The government could hardly have been in steadier hands on that terrible day: Clarke, we discover in these pages, has nerves of steel. Informed by an aide that Osama bin Laden may have put out "a contract" on his life, Clarke responded with insouciance: "Well, as Mr. Spock said to Captain Kirk, if you die we all move up one in rank." When the Secret Service tried to blanket him in protection, Clarke would have none of it, procuring instead a .357 Sig Sauer. This gun would reappear in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Late that night, Clarke writes, he went home for a quick shower and change of clothes and then "found my Secret Service-issued .357 sidearm, thrust it in my belt, and went back out into the night, back to the West Wing."

Finally, and again like Clinton if not more so, Clarke is a man of parts, sophisticated in both taste and intellect. In one scene, he and a buddy drain a

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bottle of Lagavulin single-malt scotch. In another, he sips a pinot noir that he stocks from a small Russian winery he has discovered. Analyzing the politics of Iran, he invokes the theory of revolution advanced by the historian Crane Brinton (somewhat spoiling the effect by calling him "Britton").

IN ADDITION to the book's heroes, there are, of course, its villains. Their number includes those Clinton-era government agencies that could not be moved to go after the terrorists, as well as Clinton's political enemies whose "bitterness . . . knew no bounds" and who were willing to endanger the country "for their own political ends." Above all, however, the villains of *Against All Enemies* are Bush, Cheney ("a right-wing ideologue" with "strong, almost extreme beliefs"), and their top appointees. These, at an hour when "the nation needed thoughtful leadership to deal with the underlying problems September 11 reflected," offered nothing but "unthinking reactions, ham-handed responses, and a rejection of analysis in favor of received wisdom."

Extravagant in lauding his heroes, Clark is even more extravagant in condemning his villains. In the book's preface, he notes portentously the oath of office that is sworn by everyone undertaking to serve in government, focusing especially on its solemn pledge to defend the Constitution "against all enemies." Such enemies include not only foreigners but others as well—and notably, Clark warns, "those who would use the terrorist threat to assault the liberties the Constitution enshrines. Those liberties are under assault and, if there is another major, successful attack . . . there will be further assaults on our rights and civil liberties."

The peril referred to here can come from nowhere else than our own government. The very title of Clarke's book, in other words, has been chosen to signify that Bush and his administration are enemies of the Constitution—that they are, in effect, traitors.

The extremity of Clarke's characterizations contributes to lending his treatise the quality of an action-hero comic book. So do the abundant quotations, which often sound as if appearing in a bubble above the characters' heads. Since Clarke acknowledges he is working from memory, he could not possibly recall conversations verbatim, but by intentionally putting them in quotation marks he nevertheless gives them a spurious authenticity. Unfortunately, no matter who is speaking, everyone adopts the same phony-sounding verbal style. Even when Clarke is quoting himself, the words do not manage to ring true.[2]

Dubious quotations are just the beginning of the book's unreliability. Many individuals whose names appear in its pages book have flatly repudiated Clarke's account of events. The issues go from small to large.

Item: In the September 4, 2001 meeting at which, according to Clarke, the "principals" of the Bush administration finally got down to the problem of al Qaeda, "Rumsfeld, who looked distracted throughout the session, took the Wolfowitz line that there were other terrorist concerns, like Iraq, and that whatever we did on this al-Qaeda business, we had to deal with the other sources of terrorism." But Rumsfeld has stated, and there are records to confirm, that he did not attend this meeting at all.

Item: According to a report in the *New York Times*, two officials who were present with Clarke in the White House situation room on 9/11 have contradicted him on numerous details of what happened that day. Clarke's account, one put it, "is a much better screenplay than reality was." The words are Franklin Miller's, the same colleague who allegedly told Clarke, "I'm working for you today"—words that Miller likewise denies having uttered. Still another official, Clarke's own deputy at the time, has refused to confirm Clarke's version of what Bush said to them on 9/11. "I'm not going to get into that," he told the *Times*. "That is Dick's characterization."

Item: Wolfowitz has testified under oath about Clarke's statement that references to *Mein Kampf* raised his Jewish hackles. "I can't recall ever saying anything remotely like that [and] don't believe I could have," Wolfowitz stated, explaining that he himself has often invoked *Mein Kampf* to illustrate his conviction that we need to take seriously what our enemies say. As for Condoleezza Rice's looking "skeptical" about the threat from bin Laden, even before Bush's election she had spoken of "the terrorist threat to the United States itself. . . . We don't want to wake up one day and find out that Osama bin Laden has been successful on our own territory." Citing Clarke's claim that he foresaw an attack on American soil, Rice has stated that "he never communicated that to anyone"; nor has he produced a document to show that he did.

Item: During the Reagan administration, Clarke writes, he went to Richard Perle, then the Assistant Secretary of Defense, to urge that the Pentagon stop blocking the transfer of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to the Afghan *mujahideen*. Having made his case, he waited in Perle's office while

[2] One way in which *Against All Enemies* differs from a comic book is in its utter lack of humor, except of the inadvertent kind. Here is the clench-jawed Clarke rhapsodizing about Bush's predecessor in the Oval Office: "Clinton approved every snatch that he was asked to review."

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Perle ducked in to see Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger; the problem was solved on the spot. Although the account is half-flattering to him, Perle says that it is sheer fabrication and that no such meeting occurred.

Item: Clarke taxes both Wolfowitz and R. James Woolsey, Clinton's Director of Central Intelligence, with being members of a "small cult" enamored of the theory, championed by the Iraq expert Laurie Mylroie, that Saddam Hussein was behind the World Trade Center bombing of 1993 and had a hand in the 9/11 attacks as well. To indicate the degree to which Mylroie is out of touch with reality, Clarke cites her assertion "that the real Ramzi Yousef [one of the 1993 bombers] was not in the federal Metropolitan Detention Center in Manhattan, but lounging at the right hand of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad." There is, however, no such assertion in Mylroie's book on the subject; rather, she reports accurately that Yousef, who had initially avoided capture, "was arrested and returned to the United States" in 1995. It may be that Clarke has confused Yousef with another of the 1993 plotters, Abdul Yasin (whose name he bollixes to Yasim in both text and index), who did indeed flee to Iraq where, according to published intelligence accounts, he lived on an Iraqi government stipend.

It is not only others who have repudiated Clarke. At times he repudiates himself, either by taking contradictory positions on similar questions or by giving contradictory versions of the same event. Thus, he sneers at the softness of a "White House and Pentagon that sought to give the Taliban another chance [to hand over bin Laden] after September 11," but then invidiously contrasts Bush's attack on Iraq with the wisdom of the elder Bush, who in 1991 sought to "give . . . Iraq every opportunity to avoid a war." Similarly, although he lacerates Bush for not trying to hit bin Laden before 9/11, and then for not continuing to concentrate on that goal, he applauds Clinton for not hunting Aideed in Somalia, saying that to do so "would have placed the prestige of the United States against the resourcefulness of one man hiding in his own country." Having patted himself on the back for not leaping to conclusions about the identity of the Oklahoma City bombers, he castigates Bush for instructing his staff to look carefully into the possibility of an Iraqi role in 9/11. And so on.

In television interviews, Clarke has continued to embellish his account of what Bush said to him on 9/11. This is how he presented it on *60 Minutes*:

> The President dragged me into a room with a couple of other people, shut the door and said, "I want you to find whether Iraq did this.". . . [T]he entire conversation left me in absolutely no doubt that George Bush wanted me to come back with a report that said, "Iraq did this."

But in his book Clarke has Bush *agreeing* that al Qaeda did the attack, while pressing his aides to review the evidence to "see if Saddam was involved"—a reasonable question to have asked.

To underscore the supposed absurdity of Bush's supposed fixation, Clarke added on *60 Minutes* that "there is no evidence that Iraq was supporting al Qaeda ever." But CIA chief George Tenet wrote to the Senate in 2002 that the agency knew of "senior-level contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda going back a decade," and that "Iraq has provided training to al Qaeda members in . . . poisons and gases and making conventional bombs." Clarke must have known this from his own work on al Qaeda; indeed, years before 9/11, accounts of the links between Iraq and al Qaeda had reached the public from none other than Clarke himself. As he mentions in *Against All Enemies*, a federal grand jury indicted bin Laden in 1998, and the evidence it received must have come from Clarke or someone working for him. According to that indictment, "al Qaeda reached an understanding with the government of Iraq that al Qaeda would not work against that government and that on particular projects, specifically including weapons development, al Qaeda would work cooperatively with the government of Iraq."

In January 1999, Clarke gave a press interview reported at the time in the *Washington Post*:

> Clarke did provide new information in defense of Clinton's decision to fire Tomahawk cruise missiles at the El Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, Sudan, in retaliation for bin Laden's role in the [U.S.] embassy bombings [in Africa]. . . .
>
> Clarke said that the U.S. government is "sure" that Iraqi nerve-gas experts actually produced a powdered VX-like substance at the plant that, when mixed with bleach and water, would have become fully active VX nerve gas. Clarke said U.S. intelligence does not know how much of the substance was produced at El Shifa or what happened to it. But he said that intelligence exists linking bin Laden to El Shifa's current and past operators, the Iraqi nerve-gas experts, and the National Islamic Front in Sudan.

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To say that Clarke is strident, self-serving, and careless or worse than careless with facts does not in itself lay his argument to rest. So let us now consider its three main points, the first of which is that the pre-9/11 Bush responded slowly to the issue of terrorism rather than treating it with the urgency it deserved.

That is easy to believe. During the first months of his presidency, as during the election campaign, Bush evinced more interest in domestic issues than foreign.[3] Until 9/11, indeed, *no* U.S. administration had been willing to pay the price to fight terrorism with the vigor such a fight demanded. This was never a matter of the amount of attention paid to the subject. It was a matter of how much to spend, in every sense. Budgetary allocations were the least of it. More important was the question of political capital. How many foreign toes would be stepped on; how many arms twisted? How many other topics would be shoved lower on the diplomatic agenda in order to press for cooperation against terrorism? What concessions would we yield in exchange? And, above all, what military risks would we incur?

Even on Bush's record, however, qualifications must be entered. Clarke himself, as it happens, gave a background briefing to the press in August 2002 at which he said: "[T]he Bush administration decided [in] late January [2001, just as it was taking office] to do two things. One, vigorously pursue the existing policy, including all of the lethal covert-action findings." By this last phrase Clarke meant the authorization to kill bin Laden.

In other words, whatever Bush's delay in going beyond the Clinton administration, he continued every aspect of its counterterrorism activity. To clarify this point, a reporter at Clarke's briefing asked: "You're saying that the Bush administration did not stop anything that the Clinton administration was doing?" To which Clarke responded, "Correct."

As for the briefing's second point, Clarke added that the new administration was going "to initiate a process to look at those issues which had been on the table for a couple of years and get them decided." What he was referring to here were a number of tougher measures that the Clinton administration had failed or declined to undertake. In the spring of 2001, said Clarke, the Bush team "decided in principle . . . to add to the existing Clinton strategy and to increase CIA resources, for example, for covert action." Then, "over the course of the summer . . . they developed implementation details," and at the September 4 meeting, the administration formally "authoriz[ed] the increase in funding fivefold . . . and then changed the strategy from one of rollback with al Qaeda over the course of five years, which it had been, to a new strategy that called for the rapid elimination of al Qaeda."

At the hearing this past March of the so-called 9/11 commission, former Illinois Governor James Thompson confronted Clarke with the discrepancy between his current assault on Bush and his words at that 2002 briefing. Clarke replied that, at the time, he "was a special assistant to the President, and I made the case I was asked to make." Thompson persevered: "Are you saying . . . you were asked to make an untrue case to the press and the public, and that you went ahead and did it?" To this Clarke replied: "No, sir. . . . Not an untrue case. I was asked to highlight the positive aspects of what the administration had done and to minimize the negative aspects." Thompson then walked Clarke through each of the actions he had credited to the Bush administration in 2002, and Clarke reconfirmed the accuracy of each. What justified his recent diatribes, he now proposed, was that the September 4 meeting of "principals" included only cabinet-level officials, and the policy innovations did not become law until Bush signed them, which did not occur until after September 11.

If this sounds confusing, the reason is that Clarke was throwing up a smokescreen. The facts that he himself touted as a Bush aide and was now reconfirming as a Bush critic are these: in a process that began as soon as the administration took office but did not reach completion until after 9/11, Bush put into place a major intensification of the campaign against terrorism in general and against al Qaeda in particular.

The worst you can say about this is that it took too long. But how much difference did the delay make? Listen to what former Senator Slade Gorton asked Clarke at the same hearing of the 9/11 commission: "Assuming that the recommendations that you made . . . had all been adopted say on January 26, 2001 [when Bush took office], is there the remotest chance that it would have prevented 9/11"? Clarke responded in a single word: "No."

The second major point in Clarke's case is that the war in Iraq has undermined the fight against terrorism. For one thing, he writes, it would have been better, after removing the Taliban, to deploy massive forces to Afghanistan in order to "establish a security presence throughout

[3] I myself abstained in the 2000 presidential vote because, while I found Al Gore obnoxious, I was put off by Bush's apparent lack of interest in world affairs.

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the country" and to hunt down remaining al-Qaeda members and leaders. For another, the Iraq war has inflamed the Arab world, generating more enemies just at the moment when we should have been undertaking "a concerted effort . . . to counter the ideology of al Qaeda and the larger radical Islamic terrorist movement." He elaborates:

> The only way to stop it is to work with leaders of Islamic nations to insure that tolerance of other religions is taught again, that their people believe they have fair opportunities to participate in government and the economy, that the social and cultural conditions that breed hatred are bred out.

Should we be concentrating our armies in Afghanistan? Geographically, that country is half again as large as Iraq, with much forbidding terrain and a tradition of rule by warlord. American occupiers would likely make easier targets there than in Iraq. The hunt for al Qaeda, moreover, might well be fruitless, no matter how many U.S. troops were involved. With America tied down in Afghanistan and demonstrably reluctant (under Clarke's plan) to go elsewhere, the terrorists would quickly find refuge in Lebanon or Syria or Iran or Somalia or Sudan or other outbacks of the Islamic world. We would be left in Afghanistan, a country where the prospects for modernization of every kind are weaker than in Iraq, and the war against terror would reach a dead end.

That the war in Iraq has inflamed the Arab and Muslim world cannot be doubted (though it has also inspired both a new caution and unprecedented talk of reform). But those worlds were inflamed by the war in Afghanistan, and none too friendly to us before that. A Gallup poll of nine predominantly Muslim countries taken in late 2001, more than a year before Iraq, found vastly larger numbers with an unfavorable opinion of the U.S. than a favorable one.[4] Comparing the 9/11 attacks and America's attack on Afghanistan, twice as many found the latter "totally unjustifiable." Moreover, in a reaction of collective denial, majorities of 80 and 90 percent said that Arabs were not the ones responsible for 9/11, even though bin Laden had already issued a videotape claiming credit. What this suggests is that any American use of force against Middle Eastern terrorists would have elicited an angry, defensive reaction. Clarke's own pet project, which he could sell to neither the Clinton nor the Bush administration before 9/11, was to engage in repeated bombing of Afghanistan to eliminate it as an al-Qaeda base. Does he imagine that this would not have "inflamed" Muslims?

The same Gallup poll demonstrated the depth of the psychological problem we face in the Arab world. Clarke's suggestions for meeting this problem—to make "moving appeal[s]" for religious tolerance and to change "cultural conditions" in some unspecified way—are absurd and vacuous. The Bush strategy has been at once much more ambitious and much more realistic: to try to change the underlying *political* conditions of the region by, in brief, promoting democracy. The first test of this strategy is Iraq; there is no assurance that it will work, but in contrast to Clarke's blather it is the quintessence of seriousness.

Where Clarke's argument is weakest of all is in its third point—the attempt to portray Clinton as stronger against terrorism than Bush. Strength was hardly the trademark of Clinton's foreign policy. He had begun his presidency by cutting upward of $120 billion from a defense budget already radically reduced by Bush senior at the end of the cold war. Although he had criticized Bush in the 1992 campaign for his inaction on Bosnia, once in office Clinton remained inert on Bosnia during three more years of bloodshed because, as he testily told a pressing journalist, "what I got elected to do was to let America look at our own problems." He took action only in 1995, when his campaign advisers warned that Bosnia could be a liability in his 1996 reelection campaign.

When the U.S. rangers were killed in Somalia in 1993, Clinton hastened to withdraw our forces. For all the spin Clarke puts on this, he confesses that bin Laden and al Qaeda somehow missed the message he would have wished them to receive: "Even though the U.S. had not 'cut and run' . . . they perceived that it had."

On other issues, Clinton's stance was of a piece. He responded to the challenge of the North Korean nuclear program by negotiating a "framework agreement" that provided aid to Pyongyang even while the North Koreans continued to develop weapons in secret. He backed down, humiliatingly, from his own ultimatum to China over human rights. He steadfastly blocked any intervention in Rwanda to interrupt the most clear-cut case of genocide since Hitler. The one instance in which he ordered significant military action was the air campaign against Serbia over Kosovo; although this was crowned with success, its most noteworthy feature in the eyes of much of the world was Clin-

[4] See my "Hearts, Minds, and the War Against Terror," Commentary, May 2002.

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ton's steadfast refusal to employ any ground troops, lest they be shot at.

If Clinton's overall record on foreign policy was far from strong, his record on terrorism was no stronger, notwithstanding Clarke's determined effort to convey a different impression. When Saddam Hussein sent agents to assassinate the senior Bush in 1993, Clinton responded by lobbing a cruise missile at Iraqi intelligence headquarters—but only on a Saturday night, in the hope, explains Clarke, that it would cause no casualties. When the apartment complex housing American troops in Saudi Arabia was bombed in 1996, with much evidence of Iranian involvement, Clinton declined to respond except by some covert action that had no known effect. The attacks on our embassies in Africa in 1998 brought the single cruise-missile strike on an empty bin Laden camp in Afghanistan and on the pharmaceutical plant in Sudan that may or may not have been a site of illicit activity. And when the *U.S.S. Cole* was attacked in the port of Aden, Clinton did nothing because, as Madeleine Albright told the 9/11 commission, we lacked the proof to confirm suspicions that al Qaeda was responsible.

And what kind of message about terrorism was sent to the world when Clinton made Yasir Arafat, that supposedly reformed terrorist, into the one foreign leader hosted more than any other at the White House, or when Secretary of State Warren Christopher paid dozens of visits to the Syrian dictator Hafez al-Assad in Damascus near the headquarters of numerous terrorist groups?

Clarke's version of history, according to which Clinton was "seized" and "preoccupied" with terrorism but handcuffed by recalcitrant federal agencies, is a fairy tale. If true, it makes Clinton out as a dangerously ineffectual president; it also renders nugatory Clarke's criticisms of Bush, who after all came to office with a much smaller electoral mandate than Clinton's and who had more than his share of political enemies, as the whole Clarke hoopla has served to remind us.

But there is no truth to it. A President who is being frustrated by his bureaucracies can always use the bully pulpit to rally public opinion. But Clinton's state-of-the-union messages to Congress hardly made any reference to terrorism at all, never mentioned al Qaeda or Afghanistan, and cited bin Laden only once, in 1999, after the African embassy bombings that were known to be his work. Even when Clinton did mention terrorism, it was not as a singularly urgent or menacing problem but rather as one item on a long list of transnational threats. As he ticked off that list in 1996: "terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, drug trafficking, ethnic and religious hatred, aggression by rogue states, environmental degradation. If we fail to address these threats today, we will suffer the consequences in all our tomorrows."

Clinton's annual National Security Strategy papers were little different. They did contain more mentions of terrorism, but only because they were themselves so much longer, each of them the size of a short book. But, year after year, they emphasized that the use of force was only a last resort. Here is the 2000 document: "Our strategy . . . combines enhanced law enforcement and intelligence efforts; vigorous diplomacy and economic sanctions; and, when necessary, military force."

Clinton, suffice it to say, rarely found it "necessary."

CLARKE'S ATTEMPT to gild the lily of Clinton's record on terrorism is a microcosm of the larger lie at the heart of his presentation, as well as of the campaign being waged by the liberal politicians, activists, and commentators who have made of him a cause célèbre. That has to do with the choices the electorate must make later this year.

Most Americans feel that the nation is indeed at war with the terrorists. In wartime, the party of strength is bound to have an electoral advantage. Since the Democrats do not want to run as the party of weakness, Clarke's tale has allowed them to construct some kind of case that they are instead the greater apostles of strength. But they are what they are.

Since George McGovern captured the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972, the Democrats have been the peace party. This was true throughout the balance of the cold war, when Democrats constantly urged a more conciliatory approach toward the Soviets and other Communist and radical regimes. And it remained true when, after the cold war ended, Saddam Hussein swallowed Kuwait in 1990 and the large majority of Democrats in Congress voted against going to war to force him to disgorge it. Both during and after the cold war, it has been consistently the Democrats who have favored lower defense budgets and tighter constraints on our intelligence activities.

Only two Democrats since McGovern's rise have captured the White House. Both of them, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, triumphed by asserting they were as tough as or tougher than their GOP adversaries: recall Carter vis-à-vis Gerald Ford on Poland, Clinton vis-à-vis the elder Bush on China and Bosnia. Both, once in office, revealed them-

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selves to be doves or felt they had to act as doves in order to lead their party.

This year, it is harder for the Democrats to strike such a pose. Their candidate, John Kerry, narrowly bested an opponent, Howard Dean, who ran to the Left of him. But this only shows how powerfully Democratic hearts thrill to the call of the dove, for on foreign affairs Kerry himself is one of the most Left-leaning of Senators. He made his first political reputation in the 1970's as leader of the hard-Left group, Vietnam Veterans Against the War. When he entered the Senate in 1984, he championed a "nuclear freeze," opposed or sought to cut the funding of dozens of weapons, and quickly established himself as one of the Senate's two most strident opponents of Reagan's efforts to resist Communism in Central America. In the 1990's, he opposed both the first Gulf war and the effort to arm Bosnia's Muslims for self-defense. Last year he voted to authorize force in Iraq but then cast one of only twelve votes against authorizing funds for the occupation and reconstruction of that country. He will be the party's most dovish nominee since McGovern.

No wonder, then, that the Democratic party has welcomed Clarke's tale like manna from heaven. But that tale, as we have seen, is a mixture of mendacity and disingenuousness.

The mendacious part is that Clinton was tougher than Bush on terrorism. To be sure, there is room to fault Bush's lack of haste in seizing this issue. But, on close examination, Clarke's complaint reduces to the assertion that Bush took eight months to approve a plan that Clinton had *rejected* for two years. Whose, then, is the greater fault?

The simple truth about 9/11 is that everybody is at fault and nobody is at fault. As long as the threat of a massive attack remained an abstraction, we as a society were not ready to pay the price of an all-out fight against terrorism. (Ironically, Clarke and his boosters now chide the Bush administration for pushing missile defense because the threat against which it is designed is likewise an abstraction.) As a democracy, it is in our nature to avoid confrontation: we entered each of the world wars and the cold war only after our enemies left us no choice. So, too, it took 9/11 for us to recognize that the terrorists leave us no choice. Since then, the only question, the question that Clarke and his defenders have tried so valiantly to obscure, has been how hard we will fight back. Whatever criticisms one might level against Bush, he has answered that question resoundingly.

The disingenuous part concerns Iraq. Our war there is fair game for criticism. Just as, in the two world wars, the allies argued with each other over strategy, a hawk in today's war against terrorism might make a respectable case that, instead of taking on Iraq after Afghanistan, we should have toppled the mullahs in Iran or forced Syria out of Lebanon—or even gone after Saudi Arabia. But neither Clarke nor any of his boosters has breathed a word about any such alternative. Instead, they put forward meaningless proposals to encamp our army (till when?) in Afghanistan, make speeches about religious tolerance, and smear Bush with the insinuation that he has already traduced or is fixing to traduce the Constitution of the United States.

And then they do one more thing. Having in effect called the President a traitor, they accuse his defenders of McCarthyism.

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What Kind of Religion Is Islam?

Alain Besançon

It is no secret that, with the return of Islam to the world stage over the last half-century, relations between Muslims and the West, or what used to be known as Christendom, have undergone sweeping changes. Nor is there any mystery to the large historical and demographic forces impelling those changes. The key event occurred when Muslim countries that for centuries had lain under the sway of European empires (*Christian* empires, as Muslims regarded them) gained their political independence and embarked upon a long-delayed, wrenching, and still far from accomplished encounter with modernity. Partly as a consequence of this development, the once-numerous Christian minorities in some Muslim countries, especially those in the Middle East, entered upon a rapid and frequently violent decline. Concomitantly, significant numbers of Muslims began to settle in the West and no less rapidly to grow there, to the point where, in France today, they probably amount to 10 percent of the overall population, with smaller but important representations in Germany, England, and the United States.

It is the last development in particular that has aroused widespread concern and comment, particularly with the rise of militant anti-Western Islam around the world and the increasing radicalization of elements in Western Muslim communities. In Europe, the discussion is routinely couched in terms of demography and comparative birth rates, poverty and crime, the desirability or nondesirability of cultural assimilation, the persistence of societal prejudice and "racism," and the like. Much more rarely is it couched, even by churchmen, in terms of religion, let alone in terms of a clash of religions.

To the contrary, the mood of the churches in Europe, both Catholic and Protestant, has long been inclined to an indulgent ecumenicism. Although several church establishments are themselves in crisis—or perhaps precisely because they are in crisis—they see their major role as one of welcoming Islam, seeking contact with it, stressing points in common, engaging in "dialogue."

Thus, to hear many official Christian spokesmen tell it, there is no problem here at all. First, they point out, Islam is a sister-monotheism, grounded, like Christianity and Judaism, in a divine revelation. Second, that revelation is recorded in a book, the Qur'an, which is "biblical" in the same sense as the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Finally, Islam, along with Christianity and Judaism, claims a common descent from the biblical patriarch Abraham. As if to seal the special comity between Christianity and Islam, Christians also note that the Qur'an makes mention of both Jesus and

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Mary, attributing to each of them a high status in Muslim eyes.

Three revealed religions, three religions of the Book, three Abrahamic religions, all having more in common than the details of history, or of faith and ritual, that distinguish them one from the other. Is there any truth to this picture?

To answer that question, we need to begin with a longer look backward. In the centuries following the birth of Islam in 622, one can discern three principal approaches to the new religion on the part of Christians. The first, represented very early on by John of Damascus, may be dubbed the attitude of refusal or, better, of conscious incompatibility.

The scion of a family of Byzantine officials who had played a role in the surrender of Damascus to the Muslim invaders, John initially served in the court of the caliph before entering a monastery in Palestine where he died in 754. Among his voluminous writings in defense of Christian orthodoxy, only a few pages are devoted to Islam; but these are invaluable, for John was a witness to the first hours. Thus, in his *Book of Heresies*, Islam is listed, interestingly, at number 100, suggesting that at this time it was still unclear whether Islam indeed constituted a wholly different religion or might be taken as another planet in the Christian galaxy, itself buffeted by numerous sectarian rifts. But there is no doubting John's opinion of Islam, or the sharp sarcasm of his treatment: Muhammad was a false prophet, and his doctrines, based on a denial of the Christian truths, are absurd.

John was also the author of a later work, *Controversy Between a Muslim and a Christian*. This was a sort of catechism, designed to prevent Christians from converting to the new faith (which numbers of them were already doing). Here John vigorously defends the idea of free will and sets out to refute the determinism and fatalism that he associates with Islam; along similar lines, he insists on the immutability of the laws of nature, as against the Islamic conception of a sublunar existence beholden at every moment to the whim of God. Throughout, John speaks in a condescending voice not unlike that of some 19th-century English theologian stooping to consider the merits of the *Book of Mormon*.

Five centuries after John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas extended and deepened the posture of outright rejection. In his *Summa contra Gentiles* (I, 5), Aquinas argues that Muhammad was a seducer of men whose commandments appeal only to the carnal appetites; that the truths he taught are of the lower variety, suited to vulgar minds; that mixed in with these truths are teachings of a fabulous nature that utterly compromise them; and that the plausibility of his doctrines rested on the power of his weapons—a characteristic he shared with brigands and tyrants. As for Muhammad's use of the Old and New Testaments, he disfigured them both with mythical concoctions while forbidding his followers to read the originals. In sum, "those who place their faith in his word believe mindlessly."

But even as Aquinas was writing, a second Christian approach to Islam had begun to develop in Europe. I call it, in shorthand, the Three Laws. A good example may be seen in the record of a debate between the future Byzantine emperor Manuel II (Manuel Paleologus) and a wise Muslim in 1390. The question before them was how to establish an order of priority among the laws of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

Manuel starts by asserting that Muslim law is inferior to Mosaic law; he points in particular to the doctrine of jihad, according to which non-Muslims in lands conquered by Muslims are to be given the choice of conversion, death, or slavery. But bloodshed and violence, Manuel avers, are displeasing to God, Who would rather men were brought to true faith by means of persuasion. And if Muslim law is inferior to Jewish law in this respect, a fortiori it is inferior to Christian law.

The Muslim responds by concurring that Christian law is indeed superior to Mosaic law, but not to the law of Muhammad. His objection is that the spiritual discipline Christianity demands of us—to love one's enemies, to seek out poverty, to embrace chastity—is too difficult, too elevated, too impracticable. By contrast, the Qur'an holds to the middle way, the golden mean between the deficiencies of Mosaic law and the excesses of Christian law, and this mean is consonant with both reason and good morals.

Manuel's reply draws on classical Christian polemics. He distinguishes the precepts of the Jewish and Christian Bible from the "evangelical counsels," designed to guide those who receive a call to a life of perfection. Then he delivers his knockout punch. Your law, he informs the Muslim, is a step backward, a retreat from Christian law to the law of Moses—which, to make matters worse, Muhammad plundered and then corrupted, manufacturing from it something motley and disordered.

The quality of the argumentation aside, notice what is going on here. Manuel is patently sincere,

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and is making a conscious effort to debate on neutral ground. Thus, he conspicuously refrains from appealing to the authority of Scripture, since his Muslim counterpart does not recognize it. Nor does he emphasize the historical continuity between Judaism and Christianity, or invoke the concept of a covenant with God, which is similarly unrecognized in Islam. Instead, he feels obliged to lay out the three "laws" abstractly, on the same ahistorical plane. In order to refute the law of the Qur'an, he then holds up the specter of Judaism, which, he says, is carnal where Christian law is spiritual.

In so saying, however, Manuel (reverting to the Platonist bias of Byzantine Christianity) implicitly abandons his original position—namely, that Islamic law is inferior to Jewish law—and sets out on a path that will end by privileging Islam over Judaism. And this brings us to the third approach to the problem, which involved the search for a more accommodating attitude.

My example here is *De pace fidei* ("On the Peace of Faith"), written in 1452, just before the fall of Constantinople, by Nicholas of Cusa, a philosopher and a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. Nicholas's conscious intention was to find a higher and more inclusive vantage point, one that would allow him to reinterpret Islam as an unconscious if imperfect version of Christianity. Since, like Manuel, he too must refrain from invoking the final authority of the Bible, he starts by positing a common tenet: faith in the one God. From this first axiom, he then proceeds to deduce, via a learned and recondite chain of reasoning, the Trinity and the other great Christian dogmas. Through this method he hopes to persuade his Muslim interlocutor, who has himself been nourished on the rationalist philosophy of Avicenna, to see the light of Christian truth.

Once again we may pass over the fine points of the debate to notice how Nicholas has obliged himself to neglect the history of salvation as it is understood by Christians to have unfolded over the course of the Old and New Testaments. In the attempt to meet his debating partner on neutral ground, he too finds himself fighting on Muslim territory, stripped of the armor of sacred history and equipped only with the weapon of philosophy. His theology has been disembodied, reduced to abstraction. The transcendent point he seeks has become a point of darkness, one of those nights in which, as Hegel famously remarked, all cows are gray.

In short, the two attempts at dialogue—by Manuel II and Nicholas of Cusa—led to a monologue. The Christian religion is indeed held to be necessarily true and certain, but Christianity itself has been knocked off-center. It is as if the effort to make themselves understood to Muslims subtly required these two fine intellects to traduce their own, thoroughly orthodox beliefs. It is now necessary to see why that is so.

WHAT STATUS does Islam occupy in Christian theology? To be precise, is it a revealed religion or a natural religion?

Those terms have specific meanings in classical Christian theology, according to which mankind is divided as follows. Those who survived the biblical flood are considered (as they are in rabbinic theology) to be under the terms of the covenant that God struck with Noah (Genesis 9). As such, they are bound by natural law and by universal morality; they may also partake of some idea of the divine within the framework of their own pagan religions. Out of this common humanity, whose seed continues everywhere in existence, God then revealed Himself to one man, Abraham, choosing him and his household to be the bearers of His special favor. With Abraham He struck another covenant, which was further developed many generations later in the covenant Moses received in the name of the people Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai. Finally, through the person of Jesus, His incarnated Word, God instituted a "new covenant"—one that, having originated long before with Abraham and Israel, and having proceeded through the messiahship of Jesus, will eventually extend to all mankind.

Within this scheme, where to locate Islam? For Christians and Jews alike, the difficulty—and the embarrassment—lie in the indisputable fact that Islam believes in one God, eternal, almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, merciful. Is not this formula, which I have adapted from the Christian credo, continuous with the words spoken by the Lord when He passed before Moses on Mount Sinai at the second giving of the Ten Commandments? Yes. But those same Ten Commandments open by identifying God as the liberator of His people in a particular historical situation: "I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." In the God of the Qur'an, there is no such history.

Nor is that the only problem that presents itself if one tries to approach Islam as a revealed religion, at least as Christians and Jews understand the term. The Christian Church believes that it is the desire of the revealed God to manifest Himself and communicate His message of redemption, letting man

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know of the truths that elude the grasp of the human mind unaided by grace. To the revelation contained in the Hebrew Bible, the Christians added a "new testament," while continuing to recognize the full authority of the document given before the arrival of their messiah.

Muslims also hold that they received a revelation. It is conceived, however, not as part of a historical narrative but as the transmission of an eternally preexisting text. In this transmission, the prophet, Muhammad, does not play a role akin to that of Moses and Jesus. He does nothing but receive texts, which he repeats as if under dictation. As opposed to the Bible, which Christians declare to have been "inspired," the Qur'an is uncreated. It is the uncreated Word of God.

Islam distinguishes between an authentic prophet (*nabi*) and a messenger (*rassul*), or one who has received a particular legislative message. Adam, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus were messengers, dispatched to particular peoples. Only Muhammad, the "seal of the prophets," received a universal mission. That mission was made necessary because the books of the earlier messengers of God, which were also dictated, had become falsified. Jews and Christians had manipulated the writing and distorted the meaning. That is why Muslims do not credit the worth of revealed documents prior to their own. The true Torah, the authentic Gospel, is to be sought nowhere else than in the Qur'an. Muslims are the true followers of Jesus.

The ball is thus in the court of Jews and Christians. Can they recognize their Bible, or their two Testaments, in the Qur'an? The answer is no.

Muslims aver that Muhammad was illiterate. God declares to the prophet: "You did not know what were the Scriptures and the faith before." Yet Muhammad assuredly had some knowledge of the Bible. Medina was full of Jews and Christians of varied sects. John of Damascus believed he had been influenced by an Arian monk; others, that it was a Nestorian monk. Still, to anyone familiar with the Bible, the figures cited in the Qur'an, though recognizable, are palpably alien.

The Abraham of Genesis is not the Ibrahim of the Qur'an; Moses is not Moussa. As for Jesus, he appears, as Issa, out of place and out of time, without reference to the landscape of Israel. His mother, Mary or Mariam, identified as the sister of Aaron, gives birth to him under a palm tree. Then Issa performs several miracles, which seem to have been drawn from the apocryphal gospels, and announces the future coming of Muhammad.

Jesus is indeed granted a position of honor in the Qur'an, but this Jesus is not the Jesus in whom Christians proclaim their faith. The Jesus/Issa of the Qur'an promulgates the same message as the earlier prophets—Adam, Abraham, Lot, and the rest. Indeed, all possess the same knowledge and proclaim the same message, which is Islam. Like the rest, Issa is sent to preach the oneness of God. He is emphatically no Trinitarian, not an "associator"; "do not say Three," he protests. Nor is he the son of God, but a simple mortal. Nor is he a mediator between earthly men and their heavenly Father, because Islam knows not the concept of mediation. Nor, since in Islam it is unimaginable that a messenger of God can be vanquished, does he die on the cross; a double is substituted for him.

Foreign to Islam is the idea of a progressive revelation. The divine message, in toto, is instead infused in Adam, the first man and the first messenger. Only, men forget the message, and a repetition becomes necessary. Muhammad is the last messenger and prophet. Islam, which means "submission," is the great regulator, which restores time to an eternal present in the same manner that God periodically brings men back into obedience to His eternal decree.

Thus, for a Christian as for a Jew, there can be no continuity between the Bible and the Qur'an. The point holds even for those passages reflecting an evident concurrence on the idea of the one God. Although Muslims like to enumerate the 99 names of God, missing from the list, but central to the Jewish and even more so to the Christian conception of God, is "Father"—i.e., a personal God capable of a reciprocal and loving relation with men. The one God of the Qur'an, the God Who demands submission, is a distant God; to call him "Father" would be an anthropomorphic sacrilege. The Muslim God is utterly impassive; to ascribe loving feelings to Him would be suspect.

Are Muslims, then, like Jews and Christians, "children of Abraham"? The Abraham whom Islam claims for itself is yet another messenger—and a Muslim. He is not the common father first of Israel and then of Christians who share his faith. Indeed, since the truth, according to the Qur'an, was given totally on the first day and to the first man, it is inconceivable that Abraham could have played the founding role assigned to him by Jews and Christians. Rather, the Ibrahim of the Qur'an takes part in Muslim worship by building the Ka'ba temple and instituting the pilgrimage to Mecca. Far from Muhammad sharing the faith of Abraham, it is Abraham who holds the faith of Muhammad.

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IF ISLAM is not a revealed religion, is it a natural one?

A common feature of natural religions is a sense of God, or of the divine, being everywhere present in nature. For the Greeks and the Romans, it was enough to contemplate the cosmos, the created universe, to be certain, prior to any process of mental reasoning, that God, or the gods, existed. *Not* to believe in them was a sign of insanity, marking off the unbeliever from the realm of the human.

This is not the Christian viewpoint, which holds rather that the existence of God can be grasped only with the help of investigation and reason, with faith coming in as an act of heavenly grace to seal this acquired knowledge. But the Christian perspective is not the Islamic perspective, which in this regard bears a greater resemblance to the classical pagan sense of things. Islam does not suppose that faith is needed to perceive the divine presence; that presence is obvious. Although Islam is, to be sure, a religion of faith, where faith comes in is in acknowledging not God's omnipresence but His oneness.

In Islam, God gave a law to man by means of a unilateral pact, in an act of sublime condescension. This law has nothing in common with the law of Sinai, by which Israel joined in partnership with God, nor with the law of the Spirit about which Paul speaks in the New Testament. Rather, the law of Islam is wholly external to man, and it precludes any notion of imitating God as is urged in the Bible ("be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy"). What is required is only to remain within the limits of the pact, whose terms have been fixed by God's uncreated Word and in the Sunna, the authentic tradition. Any impulse to exceed those limits is discouraged. It is enough to do good and avoid evil in order to escape punishment and profit from the promised rewards of obedience.

There is again some similarity here with pagan conceptions, and specifically with pagan ethics. Islamic civilization is a civilization of the good life, and it offers a certain latitude in the realm of sensory pleasure. Asceticism is foreign to the spirit of Islam. There is a Muslim spirit of *carpe diem*, a this-worldly contentment that often fascinated Christians who may have seen in it a dim echo of the ancient, classical world. There is nothing like the doctrine of original sin in Islam, or eternal damnation for the sinner. Predestination, in the Muslim understanding, is not so different from the ancient notion of *fatum*.

Much fun has been made, wrongly, of the Muslim notion of paradise. Admittedly, it is not like the Jewish or Christian notion, which envisions an eternity participating in the life of the divine. In the otherworld of Islam, God remains separate and inaccessible, but man finds there forgiveness, peace, "satisfaction." If biblical religion suggests a road map that originates in a garden, Eden, and finishes in a city, the heavenly Jerusalem, the Qur'an charts a return to the garden. Ancient mythologies are replete with similar images: idealized banquets with flowing cups, beautiful virgins and young men, a climate of heavenly satiety in which all desire is fulfilled.

In concordance with natural religion (and with the Hellenistic substratum on which Islam was built), Muslim religious life offers more than one model of piety. For the truly devout, two ways are open, just as in the Greco-Roman world: philosophy (Arab *falsafa*, itself heavily impregnated with neo-Platonism) and mysticism. Less rigorous souls, with the help of the law and moderate observance of the "five pillars" of Islam, can adhere to a mild but perfectly sufficient religious regimen. This is surely a great advantage over the two biblical religions, which expect of believers a greater scrupulousness and a deeper introspection; it is also, once more, reminiscent of ancient paganism, whose rites were designed to ornament and to enhance the individual's natural, spontaneous sense of the divine.

From this perspective, two facts about Islam that always astonished medieval Christians seem not so astonishing after all: the difficulty of converting Muslims, and the stubborn attachment to their faith of even the most superficially observant. From the Muslim point of view, it was absurd to become a Christian, because Christianity was a religion of the past whose best parts had been included in and superseded by Islam. Even more basically, Christianity was anti-natural: just as Manuel's Muslim debater insisted, its moral requirements exceeded human capacities, and its central mysteries defied reason.

STILL, IF Islam may be regarded as in some sense a natural religion, it is nevertheless the case that, in their encounters with Muslims, Christians from John of Damascus onward failed to recognize in it anything like the "nature" that presented itself to their gaze in the paganism of the Greco-Roman, Germanic, or Slavic worlds, or for that matter among the natives they would later meet in the New World. But that is hardly surprising, for in Islam the very categories of nature and revelation take on wholly unfamiliar aspects. I am not referring here to such things as the peculiar arrangements of the Muslim city, or Islamic family structure, or the position of women, or the particular customs and manners of Islamic people. I have in

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mind a number of other, more essential qualities of the Muslim religion itself.

One of them, which I have already mentioned in passing, is the characteristic Islamic denial of the stability and consistency of nature. According to Islam, the world is not governed by an unchanging natural law. Atoms, physical properties, matter itself: these endure only for an instant, being created anew at every moment by God. Nor is there any straightforward cause-and-effect relation between events that occur in time. Although daytime usually coincides with the presence of sunlight and night with its absence, God can change things around as He likes and make the sun shine in the middle of the night. Miracles are thus not to be seen as suspensions of natural law but as shifts in the "habits" of God.

With causality abolished, anything can happen: in place of causes, there are *only* sequences, one thing after another. The same applies humanly. The creation of Adam does not make him the "cause" of the human line that comes after him: rather, each individual is created, like Adam, from scratch. "He created you in the womb of your mothers, creation after creation." Each stage of growth is, similarly, the result of a new creative act of God, whose intentions, like His nature, are concealed from us. With time itself perceived as an unconnected series of incidents, and nature reliant on the "habits" of the Creator, it is no wonder that to many Westerners the Muslim cosmos has seemed a borderland between dream and reality.

Another, related feature is the denial of history. The Bible *is* a history, a narrative of a revelation that proceeds in stages. God intervenes in this narrative by means of deeds and words, the memory of which is preserved by tradition and in an inspired book that is perpetually subject to interpretation. The Qur'an, by contrast, is uncreated, and there is no interpretative magisterium. It does not contain a history, but stories. God intervenes only to extend His protection to His prophets and messengers, who are infallible and without sin, and to destroy their enemies. Since the same message is transmitted by all the messengers, the "history" takes on the feel of an infinite repetition. There is no clear differentiation of past, present, and future—another dreamland.

A third connected feature concerns the moral and religious habits promoted by the Islamic system. Even if we decline to credit the Qur'an as an authentic revelation, we are still obliged to account for its unique sense of virtue; and especially the "virtue of religion" as it was understood in Roman times by Cicero. What complicates this task is that, under Islam, and notwithstanding what I said earlier about the moderateness of the religious life, the domain of one's duties can be pushed beyond what biblical religion considers appropriate.

In the latter, man is responsible for conducting his affairs within the framework of a universe—natural, social, political—that operates by internally consistent rules. The performance of one's religious and moral duties is thus confined to a rationally definable area. In Islam, by contrast, the will of God extends, as it were, to the secondary causes as well as to the primary ones, suffusing all of life. Religious and moral obligation can thus take on an intensity and an all-encompassing sweep that, at least in Christian terms, would be regarded as trespassing any reasonable limit.

These, then, are some of the elements that conduce to misunderstanding when Christians and Jews approach Islam. Such outsiders may well be struck by the religious zeal of the Muslim toward a God whom they recognize as being also their God. But this God is in fact separate and distinct, and so is the relation between Him and the believing Muslim. Christians are accustomed to distinguish the worship of false gods—that is, idolatry—from the worship of the true God. To treat Islam suitably, it becomes necessary to forge a new concept altogether, and one that is difficult to grasp—namely, an idolatry of the God of Israel. To put it another way, Islam may be thought of as the natural religion of the revealed God.

Let us now return to the present. Today's Islam, the Islam that is growing in strength and in assertiveness, seems no more attracted by Christianity than was yesterday's. For some Christians, however, Islam exercises an undeniable appeal.

In Europe, this appeal owes much to the work of a single scholar, Louis Massignon (1883-1962). For it was Massignon who disseminated the still-influential opinion that the Qur'an constitutes a sort of "biblical" revelation and that Muslims are "children of Abraham." An entire literature favorable to Islam has grown up in Europe, much of it the work of Catholic priests under the sway of Massignon's ideas.

Of course, reading these books, one begins to sense the presence of other elements as well. Contributing to the partiality toward Islam is an underlying dissatisfaction with modernity, and with our liberal, capitalist, individualistic arrangements. These are implicitly found wanting when contrasted with the enduring beauties of traditional Muslim culture, among which the spirit of community, the courtesy and warmth of family relations, and

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the shared customs and ceremonies are often singled out for approving notice. Alarmed by the ebbing of religious faith in the Christian West, and particularly in Europe, these writers cannot but admire Muslim devoutness. They are filled with wonder at the spectacle of men who, whether alone in a desert or in the midst of a crowded European factory, stop whatever they are doing and bow down five times a day in prayer. Surely, they reason, it is better to believe in something than to believe in nothing, and since these Muslims believe in something, they must believe in the same thing we do.

But this is to confuse demonstrations of faith with religious beliefs. In losing sight of the difference between the two, these writers commit other and even more dangerous confusions. Thus, many of them make a point of noting the honor paid to Jesus and Mary in the Qur'an, ignoring the fact that this Jesus and this Mary have nothing but their names in common with the Jesus and Mary of Christianity. And that is only one of several willful misreadings of Islam whose cumulative effect is not only to destabilize Christian self-understanding but to disturb, fatally, the theological relation between Christians and Jews.

Does the honor paid to Jesus and Mary suggest, from the Christian point of view, that Islam is "better" than Judaism, which refuses to pay such honor to the Holy Family? That would seem to be the conclusion of those who, from this perspective, weigh Judaism and Islam in the balance, with the advantage going to Islam. But no serious Christian can seriously entertain such an idea, and the Catholic Church has historically condemned it—for good reason. To accept it would mean giving up the Church's claimed descent from Abraham and from the prophets of Israel; it would mean giving up the Davidic genealogy of the Christian messiah; it would mean cutting Christianity off from its sources and its history. The Gospel would then become, in effect, another Qur'an.

OF ALL the contemporary expressions hinting at a consanguinity between the Qur'an and the Bible, the falsest may be "religions of the Book." This phrase is itself of Islamic origin, but it has nothing to do with what it is widely and misleadingly supposed to suggest. It refers, rather, to a special legal category, "people of the Book," that provided an exception for Christians and Jews to the general rule decreeing death or slavery for those who refused to convert to Islam. Instead, these groups (as well as two other peoples in possession of a scripture, namely Sabians and Zoroastrians) were allowed to retain their property and to continue to reside in Muslim lands with the second-class status of *dhimmi*.

That such expressions can be so lightly employed is a sign that elements of the Christian world are no longer capable of distinguishing clearly between their own religion and Islam. Are we returning to the times of John of Damascus, when it was possible to entertain the deluded thought that Islam might itself be a form of Christianity? It is not inconceivable. History records more than one instance of a Christian church unconsciously drifting toward Islam when it does not know any longer what it believes in, or why. This was precisely the fate of the Monophysites in Egypt, the Nestorians in Syria, the Donatists in North Africa, the Arians in Spain.

Islam is not some primitive, simplistic, unworked-out religion. It is neither a "religion of camel drivers" nor a religion of soft and malleable borders. To the contrary, it is an extremely strong religion, with a specific and highly crystallized conception of the relation between man and God. That conception is no less coherent than the Jewish and Christian conceptions; but it is quite opposed to them. Although some Christians may imagine that, because Muslims worship the common God of Israel, Islam and Christianity are closer than either is to paganism, this is not the case. In fact, Christianity and Islam are paradoxically but radically separated by the same God.

It follows that the effort to engage in "dialogue" with Muslims has been set on a mistaken course. The early Church fathers deemed the works of Virgil and Plato a *preparatio evangelica*—preparation for the Gospel, for the truth of Christianity. The Qur'an is neither a preparation for biblical religion nor a retroactive endorsement of it. In approaching Muslims, self-respecting Christians and others would do better to rely on what remains within Islam of natural religion—and of religious virtue—and to take into account the common humanity that Muslims share with all people everywhere.

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Jihad in Jakarta

Joshua Kurlantzick

In early March, the man thought to be the mastermind behind the horrific October 2002 bombing of a nightclub in Bali walked out of an Indonesian courtroom with a drastic reduction in his already short sentence. Abu Bakr Bashir had been fingered by accomplices as the spiritual and operational leader of Jemaah Islamiah, the terrorist group believed responsible for the attack, but trial judges had acquitted the radical Islamic cleric of all but a few minor charges in the first stage of the proceedings against him. Outside the courtroom in March, Bashir's allies celebrated his latest legal victory, chanting anti-American and anti-Jewish vitriol.

Indonesia's president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the head of the country's largest secular political party, said little about Bashir's impending release. Other Indonesian leaders argued that the threat of militant Islam, and of terrorism in general, was exaggerated—that the recent bombings in Indonesia had been concocted by the U.S. to frame innocent Muslims. Back in his holding cell, Bashir himself appeared supremely confident, telling reporters, "There's nothing [for me] to worry about."

Such ominous scenes are becoming increasingly common in this sprawling archipelago of 220 million people, the world's largest Muslim nation and one known historically for its mild, tolerant version of the faith. The American public and political class are vaguely aware of these developments, but news from Jakarta seldom makes the front page at a time when the U.S. is understandably preoccupied with events in the Middle East. This inattention may carry a price, however. Like other corners of the Islamic world where our most determined enemies are fast establishing a foothold, Indonesia has the makings of a serious problem in its own right.

Islam first arrived in Indonesia in the 9th and 10th centuries, carried by Arab and Indian traders. Unlike the Middle East, which was converted at the point of a sword, Indonesia adopted Islam peacefully, often combining it, in the syncretism common to the region, with traditional folk religions. Many Indonesians continued to drink alcohol, few women donned headscarves or full burqas, and Muslims coexisted easily with their non-Muslim neighbors. The predominantly Hindu island of Bali shunned the religion altogether.

When Indonesia formally gained its independence from the Netherlands in 1945, a group of religious conservatives pushed to make *shari'a* (Islamic law) part of the constitution, but the public resisted and secular politicians, including Sukarno, the country's first president, defeated the effort. By the early 1970's, however, fundamentalist clerics like Abu Bakr Bashir had begun founding small Islamic boarding schools, or *pesantren*, in Java (the country's densely populated central island) and teaching their students to fight for the establish-

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ment of an Islamic state. Sukarno's successor, the authoritarian ruler Suharto, cracked down on these *pesantren* (which are similar to Middle Eastern and South Asian *madrassas*), forcing Bashir to flee in the face of a long prison sentence.

In the late 1980's, however, Suharto reversed course and began supporting Islamist groups, seeing them as a weapon to wield against the increasingly popular secular opposition. He sent Muslim leaders to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where they studied at radicalized schools, and allowed thousands of other Indonesians to travel to Pakistan for training at Wahhabist *madrassas*. (About a thousand Southeast Asians also went to Afghanistan to wage jihad against the Soviets.) More important perhaps was the establishment under Suharto of a range of Arab-sponsored Islamist front organizations, including al Haramain, a leading Saudi "charity." With the help of Persian Gulf financiers, jihadists returning from Afghanistan started to build an Indonesian network of Wahhabist mosques and schools.

Islamists in Indonesia also used Suharto's comity to establish a beachhead for violence. By the early 1990's, Bashir's associates had made contact with Osama bin Laden and began establishing cells of Jemaah Islamiah around the country. Jemaah Islamiah, in turn, started to forge links with other radicals in Southeast Asia, sending its members to the southern Philippines to receive training from al-Qaeda munitions experts in camps operated by the locally based Moro Islamic Liberation Front. In Indonesia itself, smaller Islamist groups were also forming, including Laskar Jihad, whose declared goal is to kill Christians, and the Front to Defend Islam, which has terrorized bars, gambling houses, and other entertainment establishments.

THE SIMULTANEOUS collapse in 1998 of Suharto's rule and the country's economy created an enormous opening for the Islamists. With nearly 100 million Indonesians falling below the poverty line, and the public sector laden with debt, the radical groups intensified their effort to provide social services. As public schools in many parts of the country closed for lack of funds, enrollment at *pesantren* skyrocketed. Today the archipelago has more than 10,000 of these schools, where typical decorations (as the *Financial Times* recently reported) include signs with slogans like "Death in the way of Allah is our highest aspiration." At the same time, the Indonesian Mujaheddin Council, the public face of Bashir's terrorist network, has worked assiduously to raise money, promote Islamic parties and the rule of *shari'a*, and infiltrate previously moderate civic and professional groups.

Most Indonesians have shunned these appeals; Islamic conservatives won less than 15 percent of the popular vote in parliamentary elections in 1999. But there has emerged a growing hard core of committed Islamists, young men willing not just to shout down their political opponents but to take up arms for their cause—arms often provided by active sympathizers in the army. In mid-2000, over 3,000 fighters of Laskar Jihad descended on the island provinces of Maluku and North Maluku, massacring hundreds of civilians and even sticking the severed heads of some of their victims on roadside spikes as a warning to Christians and moderate Muslims. Later that year, on Christmas eve, militant groups bombed over 30 churches across the country, killing eighteen people; Indonesian prosecutors believe Bashir himself gave the order for the attacks. Bombings have also become common in Jakarta, with the stock exchange, the residence of the Philippine ambassador, and many other high-profile sites going up in flames.

INDONESIA'S SECULAR politicians have done shockingly little to hinder the rise of the Islamists. Suharto's successor, B. J. Habibe, was unpopular with the public and simply tried to keep the massive country from disintegrating after the fall of its longtime strongman. In 1999, in Indonesia's first truly free election, Abdurrahman Wahid, the leader of one of the country's largest moderate Islamic organizations, won the presidency. A former cleric, he was knowledgeable enough about Indonesian Islam to see the extent of Wahhabist infiltration and beloved enough throughout the archipelago to do something about it.

But it was not to be. Nearly blind and the victim of several strokes, Wahid governed erratically, falling asleep at sessions of parliament and repeatedly contradicting his own decisions. He made a few important symbolic gestures, publicly condemning anti-Semitism and the rise of Islamism while encouraging Indonesia to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, but he failed to take any direct action against the Islamic radicals. Like Habibe, he did nothing to regulate the flow of money from foreign Islamic "charities" (indeed, he presided over the creation of a tax exemption that encouraged the gusher of money), and took few steps to stop the slaughter in the Malukus. His feckless efforts to reform the state-dominated economy also indirectly aided the Islamists by stoking public anger over the self-dealing of secular

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politicians. In July 2001, parliament finally dismissed Wahid for incompetence.

His replacement as president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, has been still worse. Wahid at least clearly recognized the Islamist threat, and saw that Indonesia's political and economic stasis gave sustenance to the radicals. Megawati, the daughter of Sukarno and an ardent nationalist, is a shy, publicity-averse woman who has shunned confrontation at every turn. When Islamist groups took to the streets of Jakarta after 9/11, blaming the attack on Jews and the CIA, she seemed paralyzed, unwilling to risk political capital to answer the radicals. Her vice president went unrebuked for declaring his hope that 9/11 would "cleanse America's sins," and Megawati herself, after condemning the attacks on the U.S., quickly decried the American response in Afghanistan.

In a deeper sense, Megawati has failed to see that a key source of the Islamists' appeal is their ability to present themselves as a force untainted by the corrupt vestiges of the Suharto era. Even many middle-class professionals have been disgusted by the corruption scandals swirling around Wahid, Megawati, and other moderate leaders, and they have come to believe in the need for a thorough cleansing of the entire political class. Rather than work to build a secular democratic culture that might answer these legitimate grievances, Megawati has repeatedly expressed disdain for the institutions of Indonesian civil society, declaring, for instance, that the country's civil service is little more than a "trash bin." At the same time, her administration has done various things to legitimize the Islamists. Asked about the danger posed by the spread of radical *pesantren*, the foreign minister told reporters that "the fact that some alumni . . . involved themselves in terrorist activities does not provide . . . reasons to shut down any school."

These signals have visibly emboldened Indonesia's Islamists, allowing them, despite their relatively small numbers, to shift the country's social and political culture in a troubling direction. Islamist boarding schools now recruit more openly, and their graduates have begun to influence politics in the universities, where conservative candidates won student elections in 2001 and 2002. In 2002, radicals backed by armed gangs forced Jakarta to ban restaurants from serving alcohol during Ramadan and even got parliament to introduce laws banning marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims.

On the security front, Megawati's failure to provide political cover—to say nothing of additional resources—has made it much harder for the Indonesian police and judiciary to arrest and prosecute violent Islamists. Indeed, she has looked the other way as elements of the military have continued to arm Laskar Jihad and other Islamist militias. Megawati has also declined the kind of cooperation on anti-terrorism measures that has developed between the U.S. and many other nations in the region since the attacks of 9/11. FBI agents working in Indonesia have complained about a lack of assistance from local authorities, a matter of special concern since the war in Afghanistan, which drove significant elements of al Qaeda to Southeast Asia, including the central Indonesian island of Sulawesi.

THE MOST telling emblem of Megawati's lassitude in the face of Islamist violence was her response to the Bali bombing in October 2002. At first, this attack appeared to change the political calculus in Indonesia. The country was traumatized by the event, which was the first suicide bombing in the region. The carnage, replayed constantly on national television, revolted many Indonesians, who turned out in droves at rallies condemning radicalism.

Though Megawati herself waited four days to visit the blast site, in the weeks that followed she seemed ready to act. Her government passed a comprehensive anti-terrorism law that made it easier for police to interrogate suspects, and the Indonesian authorities cooperated closely with their Australian counterparts. (Most of the casualties from the attack were Australians.) Several of the Bali plotters were quickly caught, tried, and sentenced, and the Indonesian police launched a comprehensive manhunt for members of Jemaah Islamiah. Megawati even admitted publicly that Indonesia had become a hotbed for radicals.

But the president's commitment to dealing with Islamism was short-lived. Within a few months of the Bali attack, Megawati had again grown quiet, doing nothing to rally public support for sterner measures or to answer the worries of the shattered business community (the bombing on Bali, a major tourist destination, had cost Indonesia nearly 1 percent of its GDP). The results were predictable. Officials began to suggest that Bashir himself had played no role in the Bali murders, and the terrorism charges against him were soon dismissed. In a nation not known for the independence of its judiciary, the gentleness with which the country's most dangerous Islamist was treated in court was significant. It could only indicate a lack of interest at the highest levels of government.

The United States, for its part, has been all too accommodating of Indonesia's resistance to the war

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on terror. Convinced that the capture in 1995 of Ramzi Yousef—the Manila-based al-Qaeda operative who planned the first World Trade Center bombing—had neutralized the terrorist network in Southeast Asia, American officials did little in the late 1990's to encourage Indonesian leaders to confront their own Islamists. Nor did Washington encourage cooperation on these issues among the region's friendly governments, all of which faced a similar threat.

Even after 9/11, the White House proved reluctant to press Megawati to act. The Bush administration's chief envoy to Indonesia, National Security Council official Karen Brooks, was an old friend of the Indonesian president, and was disinclined to deliver tough messages. As for measures of its own, Washington did manage to put Jemaah Islamiah on its list of proscribed terrorist organizations but, until recently, devoted few resources to investigating the flow of Persian Gulf money to Indonesia or to helping the country develop institutions of civil society that might serve as a counterweight to the growing empire of the Islamists.

FORTUNATELY, POLICIES in both countries now seem to be changing for the better. Working with the U.S., Indonesia has helped to establish a regional center for counter-intelligence sharing. The Bush administration has offered Indonesia nearly $90 million to strengthen its underfunded police—a key security priority, given the army's Islamist sympathies and atrocious human-rights record. More important perhaps, the White House has also pledged $150 million in aid for Indonesia's secular education system, a good starting point for a counterattack against Islamist indoctrination.

Indonesia is hardly a lost cause—yet. The vast majority of its people remain fairly liberal in their social and political views. Islamic parties hold relatively few seats in parliament and made only modest gains in this spring's elections, despite widespread discontent with Megawati that translated into losses for her own party. It is also still a country where (for good and ill) *FHM*, the racy British men's magazine, can launch a domestic edition. But there is no guarantee that Indonesia will stay its moderate course, and opportunities for shaping its nascent liberal-democratic political culture are fast disappearing.

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ART

Milton Avery's Art, and Ours

Steven C. Munson

TO TRY to make sense of the art of the past four decades—that is, contemporary or postmodern art—is to risk getting dizzy. There have been so many movements, and they have succeeded one another so quickly, that simply keeping them straight requires some mental effort. Pop, Minimalist, Conceptual, Neo-Realist, Neo-Expressionist, Neo-Dada, Performance, Process, Installation, Computer, Video: the list seemingly goes on and on. And while some of the products of these movements are hard to forget (others, thanks to the large critical, institutional, and financial investment made in them, we will not, I daresay, be permitted to forget), relatively little of this artistic accumulation can be called memorable in the proper sense of the word.

Instead, many contemporary art objects are hard to forget in the same way that certain types of advertising are hard to forget: they grate on our sensibility. Indeed, this quality may be something of a unifying factor in what otherwise seems a vast and disparate outpouring. And just as much of the best advertising depends for its success on precisely this quality, so, too, the art that has increasingly tended to be recognized, celebrated, bid for, and museumified in recent years has succeeded by conforming, in one way or another, to what might be called the principle of aesthetic irritation.

WHAT IS it about our age that has summoned up this need to create art with which to irritate ourselves? That is a large question, not easy to answer. But the need itself clearly exists and is often acknowledged, even if it is not fully recognized or seriously examined. This much is obvious from any random check of the current art scene and of the critical terms in which it is discussed.

"A word of caution before you wade into the dissonant, oceanic survey of the work of Dieter Roth, the German-born, Swiss multimedia dynamo, at the Museum of Modern Art [MOMA] in Long Island City, Queens," reads one recent review. "Expect to be bewildered and even put off: Roth is as irksome as he is awesome, but ultimately awesome wins out. This long overdue exhibition introduces Americans to an artist who not only erased the line between art and life but also pulverized the two into a single process."

A review of the exhibit *Douglas Gordon* (who is described as an "upstart Scottish artist") at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., strikes a similar note:

> The centerpiece of the smart, provocative, and very entertaining Gordon retrospective . . . is *24 hour Psycho*, which is Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film played so slowly that it runs a full 24 hours. . . . Gordon often appears in his own work, sometimes using his body as his canvas, and many of his pieces raise issues of risk, deceit, and faith. . . . For *Monster*, the artist transformed himself into a demon simply by distorting his features with clear adhesive tape. . . . [U]nderstanding his work requires knowledge of his methods and fixations.

Elsewhere, another critic compares the intended effects of works by the minimalist sculptor Donald

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Judd and the late "verist sculptor" Duane Hanson in these terms:

> Hanson's eye-fooling simulacra of lumpen American folks—a janitor, a jogger, a pair of hefty tourists—are scattered throughout the museum [the Tate Modern in London], reliably triggering double and triple takes. Hanson is a populist doppelganger of the elitist Judd. Both produced "specific objects" . . . that reverse the normal polarity of the looker and the looked-at in presentations of art. Both Judd's boxes and Hanson's figures impose themselves on viewers, inducing acute self-consciousness.

Then there is the catalogue for last winter's exhibition, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, of mostly female figure paintings by John Currin, a catalogue typically over-the-top in its celebration of works whose purpose is to make viewers want to squirm:

> The revival of a traditional hyperrealist style that fuses the old masters with hack commercial portraitists also adds macabre undercurrents, as if these mindless platitudes from every graduating class had been embalmed forever as motionless icons whom we can stare at as curious artifacts but who cannot return our gaze, not being quite human or alive.

And to cite a more mundane yet more elevated example, there is this from a review of a New York gallery show:

> At first glance, Sarah Leahy's black-and-white images look like photographs of land- and waterscapes, somewhat softened by a filter. But they are really paintings, painstakingly worked up with layers and layers of black ink on clear sheets of plexiglass that are shown against a white wall. . . .
>
> But is there more to what she reveals than photographs might convey? Is the evidence of the artist's hand—painting the plexiglass and sanding it between each application of the ink—enough to justify these near-photographic effects? On second thought, why raise the issue. This is the path she has chosen, and it works.

In this case, the writer's exasperation leads to an abandonment of critical inquiry (Leahy's paintings may very well deserve our attention, but it would be helpful to know why, or why not); in others, it leads to conclusions that seem so self-contradictory as to be unsustainable, as with this review of "a smashingly successful installational work by Olafur Eliasson," also at the Tate Modern:

> Eliasson's "sun," made up of hundreds of monofilament lamps (which suppress all colors except yellow), sheds aureate light through gloomy air thickened by fog machines, beneath a mirrored ceiling. Viewers sprawl about on the concrete floor, apparently felled by bliss. The work feels religious, in a secular sort of way.

To which the critic later adds, "There is something a mite cheap about the Eliasson installation. It's a walk-in special effect with touchy-feely, sentimental vibrations. But it dazzles."

THESE EXAMPLES, and many others that could be cited, are illuminating in another important respect. They raise the question: what is the purpose, for an artist, of making a painting or other work of art? Is it to express a personal vision or to create a certain "effect"? One can achieve the former by means of the latter—trompe l'oeil painting is a case in point, and it has both its charms and its limitations—but the two are not synonymous, even though they have now been largely conflated by many artists and critics alike.

A hundred years ago, a very astute observer (Julius Meier-Graefe) wrote of a painter held in high regard:

> What is lacking in his work can very well be described without having recourse to the vague domain of interpretation where the business of soul reading is involved. [His] vision . . . gives a superficial effect because his color remains superficial. It is only descriptive, it does not act, it is only the echo of an existence and does not become his own personal existence.

An "echo of existence"—whether in the form of simulated sunlight, or "eye-fooling simulacra of lumpen American folks," or paintings that look like photographs—might very well sum up the underlying impulse of much contemporary art. Such an impulse, when it is dominant, leads to academicism, which may be defined as the effort to reproduce certain approved effects; and postmodernism, in art as well as criticism, is nothing if not academic. Indeed, this is one of the chief ways of distinguishing it from the modern movement that preceded it, a movement animated by a very different kind of impulse.

As it happens, amid the latest *Sturm und Drang*-esque exhibitions at MOMA Queens and the Tate Modern and the Hirshhorn, one can see a show at the Phillips Collection in Washington where this very different impulse is fully and quite self-consciously realized. *Discovering Milton Avery*, which runs through May 16, is a relatively small show that brings together works of one of America's 20th-century masters from the museum's own holdings (acquired by its founder Duncan Phillips) with those from the collection of one of Avery's earliest and most avid admirers, the late violinist Louis Kaufman.*

With 42 paintings and 29 works on paper, the show does not offer an opportunity for a full appreciation of Avery's extensive oeuvre. What it does give us, in examples from throughout Avery's career, is a strong sampling of his genius for line, color, and composition. It also reveals the consistently high quali-

* For more on Kaufman, see "Fiddlers Three" by Terry Teachout in last month's COMMENTARY.

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ty of his output even as his style evolved in dramatic ways over a period of some four decades, and puts before us an art that became not "an echo of existence" but the painter's "own personal existence."

AVERY, THE son of a tanner, was born in 1885 in Sand Bank, New York. At the age of nineteen, he took a job in Hartford at Underwood Typewriter, working as an assembler, lathe-man, and mechanic. Over the next several years, he would enroll in lettering and life-drawing classes; in 1916, he returned to Underwood in order to help support his widowed mother (his father died in 1905) and his sister (who had four children). From 1917 to 1922, he worked the evening shift as a file clerk for the Travelers Insurance Companies, which allowed him to paint during the day. During this time he also continued his studies, transferring from the Connecticut League of Art Students to the School of Art Society of Hartford.

In 1924 Avery met his future wife, Sally Michel, in Gloucester, Massachusetts, where he had taken to summering. (Because of their age difference, he told her he was eight years younger than he was.) He soon moved to New York to be with her; in 1926, they were married and she went to work so that he could paint full-time. For the next twelve years, Avery would take sketch classes at the Art Students League. Most significantly for his career, it was in New York that he would come into contact with European modernism.

In 1928, Avery met Louis Kaufman and made his first sale of an oil painting—and a close lifelong friend. Kaufman later introduced Avery to the future abstract expressionist Mark Rothko, upon whom Avery would exert an important influence. Through Rothko, Avery became friends with two other men who would also become leading abstract painters, Adolph Gottlieb and Barnet Newman.

As Robert Hobbs points out in his catalogue essay for a 2001 exhibition of Avery's late paintings at the Milwaukee Art Museum, the esteem in which these younger artists held Avery struck the critic Dore Ashton with great force, leading him to realize what it meant to be a "painter's painter":

> I came to understand that painters' painters were those for whom painting was meant not just to solve problems, but to be offered for delectation. . . . Milton Avery . . . published no manifestos, indulged in no polemics, and followed his bent imperturbably while all around him artists were agonizing over crucial choices among the many possible 20th-century modes of vanguardism. For that reason, undoubtedly, he was considered by many as something of a primitive, a kind of Rousseauan pure soul who did what he did out of innocence. This, of course, was a mistaken view. Avery as a painter was nothing if not sophisticated.

As for the artists themselves, Hobbs cites Rothko's tribute at a memorial service for Avery following his death in 1965:

> Avery is first a great poet. His is the poetry of sheer loveliness, of sheer beauty. . . . This—alone—took great courage in a generation which felt that it could be heard only through clamor, force, and a show of power. . . . There have been several others in our generation who have celebrated the world around them, but none with that inevitability where the poetry penetrates every pore of the canvas to the very last tip of the brush.

THIS DESCRIPTION has lost none of its validity in the nearly four decades that have passed since Avery's death. Nor has the acute comment by Adolph Gottlieb (also cited by Hobbs) that Avery's last works "were as fresh as though he were a young painter" and yet displayed "the authority of an old master."

One gets a sense of exactly what Gottlieb meant—as well as an introduction to what Rothko called "the poetry of sheer loveliness"—in the show at the Phillips Collection. Both beauty and authority are to be found in such paintings as *Girl Writing* (1941), *Pine Cones* (1940), *California Landscape/Seascape* (1945), and *Green Landscape* (1945), as well as in drypoints like *Sleeping Baby* (1933), *March at a Table* (1948), and *Reclining Nude* (1948).

As these examples suggest, it was the life around him that served as the subject matter for Avery's art. His motifs included still life, portraiture (his daughter March was a favorite subject), female nudes, and landscapes, with the latter predominating in his later years. One outstanding example of his landscapes—which are considered the pinnacle of his achievement—at the Phillips is *Grey Rocks, Black Sea* (1956), an almost abstract work, with its three vertical, jagged areas of color (black, off-white, and brown) taking up most of the right side of the canvas and being locked in by the L-shaped grayish white area that covers the rest, whose source in nature is nevertheless immediately recognizable. Indeed, despite his increasingly abstract style of rendering imagery, Avery remained a representational painter throughout his career.

It was Avery's seemingly absolute control over his means of expression that gives his works their authority. At the same time, while his working methods involved careful thought and planning, plus the making of preparatory studies and drawings, his signature paintings have a quality of utter spontaneity. As he himself (quoted by Hobbs) described his goal:

> I like to seize the one sharp instant in Nature, to imprison it by means of ordered shapes and space relationships. To this end I eliminate and simplify, leaving apparently nothing but color and pattern. I am not seeking pure

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abstraction; rather, the purity and essence of the idea—expressed in its simplest form.

PERHAPS THE first thing that strikes you about the paintings at the Avery show is their apparent simplicity. Forms—such as the figure, table, and seat in *Girl Writing*—are reduced to their absolute bare essentials, articulated with few details. Perspective is distorted and imagery is cropped in such a way as to intensify the viewer's relationship to it; when it is not, as in *Nude with Guitar* (1947), the impact of the painting is somewhat dissipated.

In contrast to his boldly simplified forms, Avery's surfaces strike one as being gentle, almost self-effacing, even when he has scratched or rubbed them. These pictures do not call attention to themselves but seem modest and natural despite their exaggerations and disproportions of form (compare the huge boy and small girl playing together in *Chinese Checkers*, ca. 1941) or what has aptly been called Avery's jigsaw-puzzle-like compositions, constructed out of areas of evenly applied color. What gives them their character is Avery's extraordinarily expressive line. Capable of blunt angularity and soft sweeping curves, his line allows the interlocking color masses to breathe and to be themselves without ever losing their place in relation to each other or within the rhythm of the composition as a whole.

This is hardly to downplay the brilliant use of color—the thing for which Avery is perhaps most celebrated. If anything, the delicacy of his line finds a perfect counterpart in his refined touch in applying paint. His colors appear to lack all density; yet, however thinly they seem to have been applied, they retain their individual intensities; they *act*, separately and together, even as they embody natural forms.

Because Avery's color-values vary little or not at all, pictorial space is flattened and the overall sensation is often one of weightlessness. The critic Clement Greenberg commented on the contrast between this sensation and the tightness of Avery's compositional structures in an essay in his 1961 book *Art and Culture*:

> Nature is flattened and aerated in his painting, but not deprived in a final sense of its substantiality, which is restored to it—it could be said—by the artistic solidity of the result. The picture floats but it also coheres and stays in place, as tight as a drum and as open as light.

GREENBERG WAS not without his criticisms of Avery. Precisely because the paintings tend to be all on the surface, Greenberg, among others, has complained that Avery's "figures are not locked securely enough in place against their backgrounds," while his landscapes are more fully successful as designs. An even more telling question raised by Greenberg is whether the subtleness of Avery's art does not make it "somewhat narrow in its *impact*."

This seems on the mark. But the perfection Avery achieved within his range seems almost to outweigh the criticism. Indeed, this and other problematic issues in his art tend to fade in the presence of his exquisitely subtle sensibility and the responses of that sensibility to nature, the objects of his attention. That attention is at once direct, personal, intimate, warm (even when he is using cool greens and blues, as in the amazing *Green Landscape*), and highly sensitive to the life of things, whether it is the disposition of a seated figure, or the corner of a table, or a California coastline. His success in realizing his vision entirely on the surface and within the borders of (usually an easel-sized) canvas was key to his creating a feeling of intimacy in his pictures; and when we look at them, we lose any desire to look anywhere, or think of anything, else.

The many beautiful pictures brought together at the Phillips suggest that Avery came very close to the level of greatness achieved by the European modernists. Especially clear is the influence on him of the School of Paris, most particularly the work of Matisse. In some cases, such as *March on the Balcony* (1952), the influence seems almost correspondingly direct; in others, such as *Girl Writing*, it is more perfectly assimilated into something distinctly Avery's own.

But there is also, as others have noted, something ultimately and distinctly American in Avery's most fully realized works. This quality, strong in his landscapes and seascapes, is also suggestively, unmistakably present in his more "derivative" figures and still lifes. It has to do with his directness and openness of expression, and with a certain matter-of-factness about the way he made his art and even about the beauty he thereby created.

This self-contained yet open art is a reminder of what is possible when an artist of superior talent understands what his vocation demands—namely, a vision that is primarily concerned with the qualities of the object, rather than the subjective needs of the artist. There is nothing in Avery's paintings that even hints at trying to create an "effect," whether visual or psychological. His subject matter was the life he found around him, at home, in the country, among family and friends. But while this became the indispensable material for his artistic imagination, his art stands apart from his life, independent of it. The paradox of Avery's making this art into "his own personal existence" is that he thereby gave it a life of its own—which is what makes it unforgettable in the very best sense.

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MUSIC

Composers for Communism

Terry Teachout

AARON COPLAND, the greatest American classical composer of the 20th century, and Dmitri Shostakovich, his opposite number in the Soviet Union, had more in common than is generally realized. At a time when atonality was becoming fashionable, both men continued to write unequivocally tonal music, composing in a style that was modern yet accessible to ordinary listeners. Both loved the music of Mahler and Stravinsky, and were deeply influenced by it. Though it is not known what Shostakovich thought of Copland's music, Copland wrote perceptively about the music of Shostakovich, toward which he had interestingly mixed feelings. Had they met under favorable circumstances, they might well have become friends.

But they met only twice, in 1949 and 1960, and the circumstances of their first encounter were anything but favorable. Shostakovich had come to New York City as a member of the Soviet delegation to the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace, held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Along with such other left-wing luminaries as Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, and Clifford Odets, Copland took part in this Communist-controlled conference. In the course of it, Shostakovich, whose music had been censured in 1948 by the Central Committee of the Communist party, read a speech in which he admitted his alleged wrongdoing: "My works found response only among the narrow strata of sophisticated musicians, but failed to meet with approval among the broad masses of listeners."

At the time, which coincided with the height of the early cold war, Copland's participation in the Waldorf Conference was harshly criticized by many prominent American newspapers and magazines. *Life*, for example, described him as one of "a representative selection ranging from hard-working fellow-travelers to soft-headed do-gooders who have persistently lent their names to organizations labeled by the U.S. Attorney General or other government agencies as subversive." It was one of the reasons why he was cited as a Communist sympathizer in *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence on Radio and Television* (1950), and was later subpoenaed to testify before the U.S. Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, chaired by Joseph McCarthy. As for Shostakovich, whose music had been frequently performed in the U.S. during World War II, the direct result of his Waldorf conference speech was to brand him, both here and elsewhere in the West, as a Stalinist toady. It would be many years before his music was once again taken seriously by critics outside Russia.

What caused Shostakovich's critical standing to undergo a dramatic change for the better was the posthumous appearance in 1979 of *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, a work smuggled out of the Soviet Union by Solomon Volkov. Here the composer, who had died in 1975, expressed his loathing of Communism in the frankest possible language. Though the authenticity of *Testimony* continues to be aggressively challenged by a group of Western academics led by the American musicologist Richard Taruskin, there is now ample corroborating evidence that Shostakovich, as *Testimony* indicates, did seek symbolically to portray

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in his music the horrors of life under Stalin ("The majority of my symphonies are tombstones") and that his compositions were interpreted in that way by Soviet audiences.

Meanwhile, here at home, the alleged Communist sympathies of Aaron Copland, the composer of such quintessentially American works as *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*, faded from view as the word "McCarthyism" became synonymous with "persecution" in the lexicon of American liberalism; in time, the subject of Copland's political views ceased to be discussed, or even mentioned except euphemistically by most critics and scholars.[1] In, for example, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (1999), the first full-length biography of the composer, Howard Pollock referred to *Life*'s coverage of the Waldorf conference as marking "the beginnings of Copland's victimization by the hysteria now known as McCarthyism." But he said nothing whatsoever about the conference itself, much less about what Copland—and Shostakovich—said and did there.

A more balanced view of the conference has now been made possible by two newly published books. Solomon Volkov's *Shostakovich and Stalin: The Extraordinary Relationship Between the Great Composer and the Brutal Dictator* contains a detailed description of the circumstances surrounding Shostakovich's 1949 visit to America.[2] And *Aaron Copland: A Reader*, a collection of Copland's writings edited by Richard Kostelanetz, reprints for the first time the speech Copland gave at the conference, along with other material that helps clarify the nature of his long-standing relationship with the American Communist party.[3]

THE MERE fact that Copland had a relationship with the Communist party was long unknown to those too young to recall the American musical scene in the 30's. Instead, it was taken for granted that anyone who sought to tie him to the Communists was peddling McCarthyite slanders. Copland himself consistently denied having been a Communist. "I have no past or present political activities to hide," he said in 1953. "I say unequivocally that I am not now and never have been a Communist or member of the Communist party or of any organization that advocates or teaches in any way the overthrow of the United States government." He repeated these assertions in sworn testimony before the McCarthy subcommittee, adding, "I have never sympathized with Communists as such."

"Whether or not Copland prevaricated under questioning," Howard Pollock writes in his biography, "he clearly was not altogether forthcoming." In fact, he was lying. It is just possible that Copland was not a "card-carrying" Communist, since the party discouraged some public figures from becoming actual members on the grounds that they would be more useful as fellow travelers. In every other sense, though, he was indistinguishable from a full-fledged party member. He played for Communist groups and contributed articles on music to the *New Masses*, the Communist magazine briefly edited by Whittaker Chambers in 1932; he also composed a "workers' song," "Into the Streets May First," that was published in the *New Masses* in 1934 and reprinted the following year in *Workers Songbook No. 2*, an anthology of labor-movement songs by members of the Communist-controlled Composers' Collective.[4]

How serious were Copland's political interests? According to Vivian Perlis, he was "not by nature a political person. . . . When questioned about his leftist activities, his answer is simply, 'It seemed the thing to do at the time.'" But according to the highly sympathetic Pollock, he was "no mere fellow traveler, but rather an active, vocal 'red.'" *Aaron Copland: A Reader* provides ample confirmation of the latter view. "Those of us who wish to see music play its part in the workers' struggle for a new world order, owe a vote of thanks to the Composers' Collective for making an auspicious start in the right direction," Copland wrote in his *New Masses* review of the first *Workers Songbook*. He described "Into the Streets May First" as "my communist song" in a later letter to the Mexican composer Carlos Chávez, one of his closest friends.

In a letter to another friend, Copland described in detail how he spent the summer of 1934 working for the Communist party in a Minnesota mining town:

> It's one thing to think revolution, or talk about it to one's friends, but to preach it from the streets—OUT LOUD—. . . . [I] learned to know the farmers who were Reds around these parts, attended an all-day election campaign meeting of the C.P. [Communist-party] unit, partook of their picnic supper and made my first political speech! If they were a strange sight to me, I was no less of a one to them. It was the first time that many of them had seen an "intel-

[1] For an account of the controversy over *Testimony*, see my essay "The Composer and the Commissars" (COMMENTARY, October 1999). So far as I know, the first frank discussion of the relationship between Copland's politics and his evolving musical style was my own "Fanfare for Aaron Copland" (COMMENTARY, January 1997), reprinted in *A Terry Teachout Reader*. Articles cited from COMMENTARY can also be accessed through its website, www.commentarymagazine.com.

[2] Knopf, 336 pp., $30.00. The misleading specificity of its subtitle notwithstanding, *Shostakovich and Stalin* is actually a wide-ranging and provocative meditation on Stalin's interest in and involvement with the arts in Soviet Russia.

[3] Routledge, 368 pp., $30.00. It should be noted that *Aaron Copland: A Reader* is not primarily about political matters, but instead contains an exceptionally well-chosen cross-section of Copland's much-admired musical and autobiographical writings, including previously unpublished correspondence and diary excerpts.

[4] The song is reprinted complete in *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (1984), the first installment of a two-volume "autobiography" assembled by Vivian Perlis from oral-history transcripts after Alzheimer's disease made it impossible for Copland (who died in 1990) to write such a book himself.

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> lectual[.]" I was being drawn, you see, into the political struggle with the peasantry! I wish you could have seen them—the true Third Estate, the very material that makes revolution.

At the same time, Copland was uncomfortable with the output of some of the "proletarian artists" involved in the Communist party's Popular Front movement. Though he had simplified his compositional style to brilliantly compelling effect in the mid-30's, he recognized the possibility that such simplification could easily lead to philistinism—and went so far as to suggest as much, albeit tentatively, in an article published in the left-wing magazine *Music Vanguard*:

> I look about me and wonder why I see no young composer in America with a "First Symphony" under his arm. Inevitably, one wonders where the fault lies. Does our young composer lack the necessary craftsmanship, or the sense of economic stability, or an ideological basis for his work, or what? Each young composer must examine his own conscience, and draw his own conclusions.

Writing as he was for an audience of Communists and fellow travelers, Copland was careful to add: "Undoubtedly, in the Soviet Union they order these things better." And whatever his private reservations, they did not stop him from continuing to serve Communist-friendly ends during World War II, scoring *The North Star* (1943), the famously pro-Soviet Hollywood film written by Lillian Hellman, and serving as a member of the American-Soviet Music Society.

What Copland wrote about Shostakovich in his book *Our New Music* (1941), published eight years before the Waldorf conference, says as much about himself as it does about the Russian composer. Shostakovich seems to have been mainly of interest to him as a case study in how classical composers might grapple with "the challenge of the unsophisticated audience." Though he acknowledged the "effectiveness" of Shostakovich's music, as well as its "extraordinary 'flair' and sheer musical invention," he also found it "unnecessarily trite and conventional at times." Both men, as it happens, were trying to strike a productive balance between self-expression and accessibility. The difference was that Shostakovich was doing it at gunpoint.

What Shostakovich endured at the hands of Joseph Stalin is now a matter of public record.[5] In 1936, *Pravda*, undoubtedly acting on the direct instructions of Stalin, published a scathing editorial called "Muddle Instead of Music" that attacked his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* as "music intentionally made inside-out, so that there would be nothing to resemble classical music, nothing in common with symphonic sounds, with simple, accessible musical speech." From then on, he lived in constant fear of being swallowed up by the Great Terror. It was only his international celebrity—along with Stalin's convoluted but nonetheless real respect for such "unworldly" artists as Shostakovich and the writer Boris Pasternak—that spared him that fate.[6]

Shostakovich abandoned opera after the publication of "Muddle Instead of Music," choosing instead to pour his innermost thoughts into a series of symphonies and string quartets whose jarring combination of tortured lyricism and grotesquely exaggerated irony reflected his feelings of despair. Though he scrupulously toed the party line in all his "official" statements, Soviet listeners seem by all accounts to have understood the violence and anguish of his music as a picture of their own fearful lives.

With World War II behind him, Stalin decided that it was time once again to crack the whip, and his Central Committee duly issued a series of edicts condemning "formalism," a portmanteau word used to describe anything that deviated from the simple-minded optimism required of Soviet artists by the cultural commissars who ruled them. Shostakovich was deemed one of the chief musical offenders, and his compositions promptly ceased to be performed, broadcast, or recorded.

By then, however, the cold war was in full swing, and Western critics took immediate and hostile note of the Soviet crackdown on formalism. Recognizing that the Waldorf conference offered an ideal opportunity to reassure American fellow travelers that things in the workers' paradise were not so repressive as they seemed, Stalin called Shostakovich and instructed him to attend. The composer pointed out that it would make no sense for him to appear in New York when his music was banned in the Soviet Union, but Stalin shrewdly agreed to lift the ban (whose very existence he nevertheless denied), leaving Shostakovich with no choice but to join the delegation.

Shostakovich's participation was important because he was the only delegate who was well known outside the Soviet Union. It would thus be a propaganda coup for him to deliver a speech (written, of course, by his handlers) in which he "freely" admitted his formalistic sins. But Stalin's henchmen had not reckoned with Americans for Intellectual Freedom, an ad-hoc group of prominent liberal anti-Communists led by Sidney Hook, whose members were determined to expose the conference as a Communist-controlled charade. Inevitably, Shostakovich became one of their chief targets.

In his speech, Shostakovich alternated between obsequiously endorsing the Central Committee's anti-formalist edicts and urging "progressive Americans" to oppose "warmongers"—that is, anti-Communists. Too

[5] The composer's persecution by Stalin is discussed in detail in my essay "The Problem of Shostakovich" (Commentary, February 1995).

[6] According to Volkov, "Pasternak used to recount that when they wanted to arrest him in the years of the Great Terror, Stalin himself objected: 'Don't touch that cloud-dweller, that unworldly one.'"

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nervous to read the text out loud, he was forced to hand it to an interpreter after stammering out the first few sentences. As William Barrett reported at the time in COMMENTARY:

> Shostakovich has the face of a boy, sensitive, unformed, and immature; the face, not of a happy boy, but one sickly, nervous, drab. When he had to speak, he hunched up his shoulders nervously, thrust his face forward, and spoke at, rather than into, the microphone in a high thin voice. "How unhappy he looks!" a good many people said to me, evidently seeing in his face the unhappy soul of a musical genius suffering under the heavy burden of Russian censorship.[7]

Interestingly, Barrett questioned this interpretation of the composer's obvious discomfort: "It may be some lack of pity in me, but I could see no signs in Shostakovich of a soul in torment; his record, after all, is that of an artist with a very pliant background." That was how many liberal anti-Communists in America were inclined to view Shostakovich, perhaps in part because they were insufficiently familiar with his music to appreciate its complex ironies. But it is true that the Waldorf speech itself, like all of Shostakovich's earlier public utterances, contained no hint that he might possibly be a secret dissenter. On paper, he was a Soviet apparatchik pure and simple, making it necessary for Americans for Intellectual Freedom to brand him as such in order to discredit the conference as a farce.

That unhappy task fell to the Russian-American composer Nicholas Nabokov, who viewed Shostakovich's dilemma with more sympathy than did Barrett:

> I sat in my seat petrified by this spectacle of human misery and degradation. . . . This speech of his, this whole peace-making mission was part of a punishment, part of a ritual redemption he had to go through before he could be pardoned again. He was to tell, in person, to all the dupes at the Waldorf conference and to the whole decadent bourgeois world that loved him so much that he, Shostakovich, the famous Russian composer, is not a free man, but an obedient tool of his government.

At the end of the speech, Nabokov leaped to his feet and asked the interpreter, "Is Shostakovich personally in agreement with the attacks that appeared in *Pravda* on the music of Western composers Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Hindemith?" It was a terrible moment for Shostakovich (who would personally assure Stravinsky many years later that he had been "overwhelmed" by the latter's *Symphony of Psalms*), but he replied unequivocally and in the affirmative. Afterward, Nabokov recalled, "the dupes in the audience gave him a new and prolonged ovation." [8]

Shostakovich's own account of the speech, recorded in *Testimony*, is short and to the point: "I had to answer stupid questions and keep from saying too much. . . . And all I thought about was: how much longer do I have to live?" He lived for another quarter-century and died not in a prison camp but a hospital bed, but never in his lifetime would his reputation in the West recover from the effects of his appearance at the Waldorf conference. "From that moment, regardless of his true emotions and convictions," Volkov writes in *Shostakovich and Stalin*, "he was increasingly perceived in the West as a mouthpiece of Communist ideology and his music as Soviet propaganda."

[7] "Culture Conference at the Waldorf" (May 1949).

[8] Several reporters had previously asked Stravinsky if he would consider debating Shostakovich in public at the conference, to which he curtly replied, "How can you talk to them? They are not free. There is no discussion in public with people who are not free."

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Aaron Copland also spoke at the conference. His speech, "Effect of the Cold War on the Artist in the U.S.," published in its entirety for the first time in *Aaron Copland: A Reader*, is in large part a dismayingly typical piece of pro-Soviet propaganda: "I came here this morning because I am convinced that the present policies of our government, if relentlessly pursued, will lead us inevitably into a third World War. . . . We are being taught to think in neat little categories—in terms of blacks and whites, East and West, Communism and the Profit System."

Surprisingly, Copland did criticize the Soviet Union for "officially [adopting] a disapproving attitude toward much contemporary art, and especially in the field of music," going so far as to make specific mention of Shostakovich:

> I have no wish to embarrass our distinguished composer-guest from the Soviet Union but I see no reason why we should not point out in a friendly way that all cultural interchange becomes difficult, if not impossible, when all foreign music from the West is condemned in advance. . . . As a composer from the West myself I naturally find that attitude extreme. . . . The Soviet Union is impoverishing itself in the cultural sphere by not encouraging every possible musical exchange with our country.

At the same time, though, Copland went out of his way to blame this impoverishment on "the determinedly unfriendly attitude of the Western powers to the Soviet Union. . . . To cut ourselves off from each other is exactly what the proponents of the cold war would like."

Copland's speech makes for peculiar reading today. Had he been jolted out of his pro-Soviet complacency by Shostakovich's public degradation? But if so, was it his own Communist past that made him then unwilling to blame the Soviet Union for the cultural totalitarianism that had thereby been made so appallingly evident? Copland's friend Claire Reis, executive director of the League of Composers, recalled being "shocked" when Shostakovich said, "Stravinsky is not a good composer—he does not compose for the masses." But what did Copland himself think?

His only known statement on the matter, made in 1953, suggests at first glance that he eventually saw the light. The conference, he claimed, had given him "firsthand knowledge in what ways the Communists were able to use such movements for their own ends. . . . I had the hope that by demonstrating that relations are possible on a cultural plane, we might encourage talks on a diplomatic plane. I sponsored no further so-called Peace Conferences, being convinced that they were being engineered by Communists." But he made that statement in his testimony before Joseph McCarthy's Senate subcommittee—the same occasion on which he perjured

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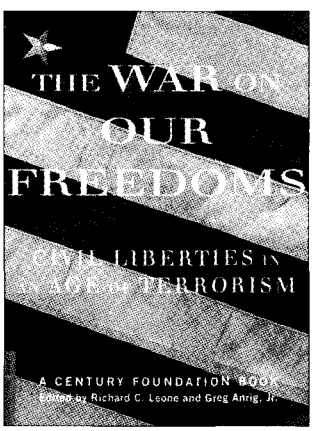
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himself when asked about his Communist ties.

In the revised version of *Our New Music* that he published in 1967, Copland appended the following remarks to his 1941 appraisal of the music of Shostakovich:

> The balance sheet of Soviet composition for the quarter-century that has passed since the above comments were written reads more dolefully than we had any reason to expect. What happened? As far as can be judged from the admittedly scarce evidence that reaches us, musical creativity in the USSR has been stultified. The revolutionary fervor of the war years, exemplified in the Shostakovich works of that period, degenerated in the compositions of others into a mere conformism.

But that was all. Not a word about the reason for the "mere conformism" of Soviet composers—even though by 1967 it was self-evident. To be sure, the bulk of Copland's letters and diary entries have yet to be published, and it may well be that they will show that Copland, too, finally changed his mind about the Soviet Union. But in the absence of such evidence, one must conclude that he went to his grave having had no second thoughts about his close relationship with the American Communist party. "It seemed the thing to do at the time," he told Vivian Perlis, and left it at that.

COPLAND AND Shostakovich met for the second and last time in 1960. The U.S. State Department had sent Copland and the American composer Lukas Foss on a tour of the Soviet Union, where they attended a dinner party given by Shostakovich at his home. Copland wrote in his diary:

> I watched Shostie while Lukas and [Russian composer Dmitri] Kabalevsky played a Haydn symphony four-hands. He loves music with a kind of innocent joy I have rarely seen in a famous composer. Music must have been a great solace to him through the tough days. I was persuaded to play my *Piano Sonata*. At the end, they all said *Spasibo* (thank you), with no comment of any kind.

"The tough days." What, if anything, did Copland know of Shostakovich's life in the 30's and 40's? He himself, after all, had no firsthand experience whatsoever of genuine political persecution. Yes, he had testified before the McCarthy subcommittee—but the Senator let him go after a single executive session and took no action of any kind against him. In 1953, his *Lincoln Portrait* was dropped from President Eisenhower's inaugural concert after an Illinois congressman objected to the programming of a piece by a Communist sympathizer, and two universities cancelled lectures he was scheduled to give—but no similar incidents have been reported. And despite being cited in *Red Channels*, Copland was never "blacklisted" (except by the Hollywood studios, for which he composed no film scores between 1948 and 1961). Instead, his works continued to be played throughout America and around the world.

Meanwhile, Shostakovich went on writing music in which he set down the secret history of the Soviet Union. "If they chop off both my hands," he told a friend, "I'll still write music with the pen between my teeth." When Stalin died in 1953, he composed his Tenth Symphony, whose scherzo is a shattering portrait in sound of the dictator who had shipped him off to New York to be publicly humiliated at the sham "peace conference" in which Copland had played a key role.

But there is an additional complication: Shostakovich's own hands were far from clean. Even after Stalin's death, he continued toadying to the Kremlin. Years before, he had decided that he would say, do, or sign anything in order to stay alive and continue composing. "I've been a whore, I am and will always be a whore," he told a friend. He went so far in his whoredom as to join the Communist party in 1960, and in 1973 he lent his signature to an official letter attacking the great Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov. This was only two years before his own death and long after his world-wide fame would likely have insulated him from any lasting consequences had he refused to do so.

Such craven behavior led many dissidents to view Shostakovich with contempt, knowing as they did that it would have made a tremendous difference had he not only refused to toady but instead spoken out. For them, the ends—his music—did not justify the means by which he ensured his ability to continue composing it. As Volkov observes:

> They did not care that he continued to write astonishing, immortal music—not pro-Soviet, not anti-Soviet, but simply "non"-Soviet music that addressed the themes of old age, death, oblivion, return to nature—music of despair and acceptance. . . . But even in these final opuses, where he seems to be looking down at his own lifeless body, his anger and hatred toward Stalin bursts out. The man, long decomposed, took on almost mystical qualities in Shostakovich's imagination. He became the very symbol of tyranny.

So ends the sad tale of Copland and Shostakovich—and also of Stalin, who cast his dark shadow across both their lives. I, for one, cannot think about this saga without being moved to ask a question that is both unanswered and unanswerable. Aaron Copland lent his support to an evil regime, at first never saying an unambiguous word against it, then refusing to say anything at all; Dmitri Shostakovich was unwilling to defy that same regime save in his music, even when he could have done so without unreasonable risk. One was a fool, the other a coward. Both were great composers without whose music the world would be immeasurably poorer—but who was the lesser man?

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Books in Review

Protestant Ethic

Who Are We?
The Cultural Core of
American National Identity
by Samuel P. Huntington
Simon & Schuster. 448 pp. $27.00

Reviewed by
James Nuechterlein

SAMUEL P. Huntington is not only a distinguished social scientist, he is a notably brave and independent one. His new book, *Who Are We? The Cultural Core of American National Identity*, is almost defiantly unfashionable and countercultural. In the face of dominant pieties in the academy, Huntington not only takes on a presumably atavistic subject—national identity—but offers an unapologetically traditional interpretation and defense of the concept as most Americans, against their presumed intellectual betters, experience and understand it. His analysis of our situation and his prescriptions for renewal are not without flaws, but they deserve careful attention and serious consideration.

Through most of their history, Americans have had a strong and unabashed sense of national identity. Huntington argues, however, that this instinctive patriotic urge, having come under assault since the 1960's, may not be able to endure in its traditional form, even with the boost it experienced in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001. How long will the flags continue to fly, he asks metaphorically, as that day fades from our memory?

As for how Americans have *defined* their national identity, that, Huntington notes, has varied over the centuries, with the relevant terms being race, ethnicity, ideology, and culture. The first two of these categories, for reasons almost all to the good, have largely been eliminated. The third, ideology, has been most strongly emphasized. Americans are firmly bound together, it is commonly held, by the bundle of principles that make up the American Creed: liberty, equality before the law, equal opportunity, individualism, human rights, representative government, private property.

Huntington does not deny the importance of the Creed, but he doubts that it can long survive without continued support from the Anglo-Protestant culture in which it grew and flourished—and which is now under attack. It is a misleading half-truth, he says, to refer to America as a "nation of immigrants." The British Protestants who created America in the 17th and 18th centuries were not immigrants in the customary sense. They were, rather, founders or settlers who created the society and culture that all future immigrants assimilated into. As he nicely puts it, "Before immigrants could come to America, settlers had to found America."

The distinctive features of the American Creed, in Huntington's view, grew out of a culture that included "a work ethic, the English language, British traditions of law, justice, and the limits of government power, and a legacy of European art, literature, philosophy, and music." Subvert that culture, he believes, and you subvert also the

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foundations of the Creed and thus eventually of American national identity.

Ultimately, Huntington insists, the sources of the Creed and of American liberal principles are not secular but religious. They derive from Christianity in general and from a dissenting Protestantism in particular—a product of the English Puritan Revolution, itself described by Huntington as "the single most important formative event of American political history." It is the distinctively Protestant emphases on the individual conscience, the work ethic, opposition to hierarchy, and the responsibility to transform society that "have shaped American attitudes toward private and public morality, economic activity, government, and public policy."

Huntington hastens to add that his is an argument "for the importance of Anglo-Protestant culture, not for the importance of Anglo-Protestant people." America has happily become a multiethnic, multiracial society in which individuals can succeed on their own merits without regard to their origins. If a commitment to Anglo-Protestant culture is sustained, "America will still be America long after the Waspish descendants of its founders have become a small and uninfluential minority."

BUT CAN the commitment to a national identity based on Anglo-Protestant culture be sustained? Huntington identifies a number of factors undermining it. The end of the cold war, welcome though it was, had the negative side-effect of removing the USSR as a threatening "other" that inclined Americans to unite behind their own nation and its political economy of democratic capitalism. Enemies help to create identity.

More significant than the end of the cold war, according to Huntington, has been the emergence of theories and programs of multiculturalism and diversity that have encouraged Americans to identify themselves not with the nation as a whole but with sub-national (gender, race, and class), dual-national (especially among immigrants), and trans-national attachments. Today's elites characteristically encourage the first two tendencies in others and are themselves drawn to the third. In a globalizing world, business leaders naturally adopt international perspectives while intellectual and cultural elites increasingly think of themselves as citizens of the world, united with humanity at large.

National identity, in the view of these elites, is itself regarded as a problem. Huntington cites the well-known political theorists Martha Nussbaum and Amy Gutmann, the former denouncing "patriotic pride" as "morally dangerous," the latter urging that the "primary allegiance" of Americans "should not be to the United States . . . but to democratic humanism." In the perspective of such Left-liberal thinkers, traditional imperatives for the Americanization of immigrants have themselves become un-American. These views reveal a gap, emphasized by Huntington throughout, between ordinary Americans, most of whom are ardent and unembarrassed in their patriotism, and intellectuals and academics who tend to view patriotism with suspicion, if not contempt.

PERHAPS THE most controversial aspect of Huntington's argument concerns immigration. He sees ominous implications in the fact that, in recent years, immigrants to the U.S. have been heavily Hispanic (almost 50 percent) and particularly Mexican (27.6 percent). There are now, he notes, slightly more Hispanics in America than blacks (both make up about 12 percent of the population), and the proportion of Hispanics is likely to increase significantly in the years to come because of continued high rates of both immigration and fertility.

Huntington does not ignore the economic implications of this influx—downward pressure on wages, high incidence of poverty and welfare—but he again focuses on issues of culture. Conceding that evidence about the pace of assimilation (e.g., English-language acquisition, intermarriage rates, self-identification, naturalization) is mixed and even contradictory, he worries that Hispanic immigrants—and, again, especially Mexicans—may, unlike previous waves of newcomers, be more resistant to assimilation in the second, third, and succeeding generations.

These immigrants, Huntington points out, though coming from many different countries, overwhelmingly speak a single foreign language, Spanish, a circumstance unprecedented in our nation's experience. The result has been the formation of enclave communities in which it is not necessary to learn English to conduct the public, non-family aspects of one's life. With language being so essential to culture, Huntington raises the possibility of a future "bifurcated America, with two languages, Spanish and English, and two cultures, Anglo-Protestant and Hispanic."

CRITICS HAVE been quick to argue that Huntington's thesis—which I have only been able to sketch here—is too pessimistic. They may well be right. America is still a long way from having a substantial minority deeply separated from the majority culture, as has been the case in, for example, Quebec (though tensions seems to have abated there recently). But if Huntington is undoubtedly alarmed, he is not an alarmist, and his concerns should not be dismissed out of hand.

In terms of Huntington's larger argument, the most striking feature is the crucial place he accords to religion. This, he says early on, "has been and still is a central, perhaps the central, element of American identity." By any measure—and

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Huntington adduces copious empirical evidence—America is a religious nation, one of the most religious in the world. More than that, it is a Christian nation, culturally as well as numerically. Huntington easily dismisses those who depict America's religious condition as radically pluralistic. Americans are 63 percent Protestant, 23 percent Catholic, 8 percent non-Christian, 6 percent with no religion. And most studies indicate that the intensity of Christian belief and commitment has not subsided in recent years; it may well, in fact, have increased.

Here, indeed, in both the country's general religiosity and its Christian particularity, lie the essential underpinnings, in Huntington's view, of our distinct national identity. Our religiosity distinguishes us from the rest of the West; our Christianity distinguishes us from most non-Western nations. More than that, religion and nationalism are positively correlated. Committed religious believers—who are, in America, mainly Christians—are more likely to be committed patriots than those who are nominally religious or not religious at all. Religion, patriotism, and American exceptionalism all go hand in hand.

Huntington is surely right about this in the large. Still, even for those who, like me, are essentially sympathetic to his analysis as well as to the preservation of our distinct national identity, there is at least one significant flaw in his program. It is the term that lies at the heart of the argument: Anglo-Protestant culture. It is simply too late in the day to suppose that words so restrictive in their connotations can serve as a rallying point for a reaffirmation of national identity.

The problems with "Anglo" are so obvious as not to need elaboration, even if Huntington insists that he is speaking of a culture, not a people. And what will the more than one-quarter of American Christians who are Catholic (not to mention other, non-Christian groups) make of their presumed need to affirm Protestant culture? It is true enough, as Huntington points out, that Catholics in America have in many ways internalized values that are generally Protestant in character. But in my experience, American Catholics, especially the more devout ones who are in many ways the most likely to buy into Huntington's argument, are not simply quasi-Protestants who happen to have a thing for Mary and the Pope. The differences go deeper.

All that aside, this is a significant and important book. Whatever its limits, it recognizes and affirms the fact that Americans are still the most patriotic people in the world and that positive visions of the nation's future must build on that foundation. And this, although historians have been taught not to say so, is a Good Thing.

Patriot Games

A Secret Life:
The Polish Officer,
His Covert Mission,
and the Price He Paid
to Save His Country
by Benjamin Weiser
Public Affairs. 383 pp. $27.50

Reviewed by
Richard Pipes

Mark Twain once wrote: "Truth *is* stranger than Fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth is not." This paradoxical thought applies well to the biography of Ryszard Kuklinski, a Polish colonel who between 1972 and 1981 supplied the CIA with a steady stream of information about the most closely held secrets of the Warsaw Pact. The courage of this modest man, and the cunning he and his American "handlers" displayed in eluding Polish security services, make a tale filled with such improbabilities that I doubt any writer would consider it suitable for a work of fiction.

Born in 1930 into a worker's family, Kuklinski lost his father during the war: he died in a Nazi concentration camp after having been arrested and tortured by the Gestapo. When the war ended, young Kuklinski joined the Polish army, an institution that enjoyed a reputation among Poles second only to the Catholic Church, and rose rapidly in its ranks due to his outstanding intelligence and industry. In time, he joined the general staff, where he had access to the Warsaw Pact's war-fighting plans.

Kuklinski's first doubts about the Communist regime and its armed forces arose as he watched with disgust Poland's involvement in the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the indifference with which the outside world reacted to this event. An ardent Polish patriot, he worried whether the same fate might not one day befall his own country. He was even more troubled by what he saw of Soviet designs for an offensive war against NATO; they entailed the Red Army's traversing Poland, an act likely to trigger a nuclear response that would annihilate his homeland.

In August 1972, Kuklinski sent from West Germany, where he was vacationing, a letter to the U.S. embassy in Bonn. It read as follows:

> Dear Ser,
>
> I'm sorry for my English.
>
> I am an foregen MAF from the Communistische Kantry. I want to meet (secretly) with U.S. Army Officer (Lt. Colonel, Colonel) 17

Richard Pipes, *professor emeritus of history at Harvard, is the author, most recently, of* Vixi: The Memoirs of a Non-Belonger *(Yale).*

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> or 18, 19 [August] in Amsterdam or 21, 22 in Ostenda.
>
> I have no many time. I am with my camrade end they kan't know.

Contact was duly established, and for the next nine years Kuklinski provided the CIA with photographs of over 40,000 highly classified Warsaw Pact documents. Following instructions, he passed them to CIA agents in highly imaginative ways, sometimes by throwing them into passing U.S. embassy cars, at other times leaving them in designated places. One false step, and the entire enterprise would have been compromised.

Keeping his collaboration with American intelligence a secret even from his wife and children, Kuklinski worked under tremendous strain. Although he asked for a poison pill, the CIA refused to provide it, for fear that in a moment of panic he might commit suicide. His morale was buoyed up by personal correspondence with a CIA employee whom he knew as "Daniel" and who turned out to be David Forden, chief of the agency's Soviet/East European division.

The information that Kuklinski supplied was priceless: according to then-CIA director William Casey, during the cold war no one else inflicted such harm on the Communist cause. Kuklinski revealed the war preparations of the Soviet high command, including the location on Polish soil of bunkers designed to shelter its top field commanders; this would have enabled U.S. forces to wipe them out within hours of the outbreak of hostilities. He detailed the capabilities of Soviet air defenses and tanks. In late 1980, as the Warsaw Pact was preparing to invade Poland just as Kuklinski had feared, his data prompted President Jimmy Carter to warn Moscow against such a move, thereby evidently helping decisively to forestall such an attack.

During the first year of the Reagan administration, Kuklinski supplied intelligence on the Communist plans to impose martial law on Poland; as a member of the small group preparing this operation, he had intimate knowledge of it. In early November 1981, worried that Polish security services were closing in on him, he asked to have himself and his family "exfiltrated." The operation was executed brilliantly; Kuklinski, his wife, and his two sons were wrapped up in commercial cargo and shipped out of Warsaw to West Berlin in a truck, and from there brought to the United States.

Unlike Carter before him, Ronald Reagan decided not to warn the Polish government against imposing martial law, nor did he alert the leaders of Solidarity to their impending arrests. Apparently he was acting on Kuklinski's advice, given on the grounds that the martial-law decision was irrevocable and that disclosing it prematurely to the Polish resistance might trigger a general strike that would end in a brutal massacre.

BENJAMIN WEISER, a *New York Times* reporter, has written a fascinating account of this episode in history, the first to be based on partial access to CIA files. Here and there, Weiser passes in silence over problematic events that arouse the reader's curiosity. Besides Kuklinski's advice, what other factors, one wonders, accounted for the failure of Washington to inform the Polish resistance of the imminent imposition of martial law? How did Kuklinski adapt to American life? How to explain the fact that, to this day, so many Poles regard him as a traitor?

Kuklinski's life, which ended in mid-February of this year from a stroke, was filled with tragedies. Condemned to death in Poland, he had to hide under an assumed name in the United States. Both of his sons died under mysterious circumstances, one while sailing at sea, his body never found, the other in an automobile accident. When Poland finally shook off Soviet domination in the early 1990's, its government, instead of hailing him as a national hero, equivocated: in opinion surveys, nearly half the population said it believed he had "betrayed the interests of the Polish nation," while only 16 percent saw him as a Polish patriot. His death sentence was annulled only in 1997, with the active involvement of Zbigniew Brzezinski, and then mainly because it presented an obstacle to Poland's entrance into NATO. This allowed him finally to return to his native country in the following year.

He lived just long enough to read Benjamin Weiser's gripping account.

Fanatics

The Way to Paradise
by Mario Vargas Llosa
Translated by Natasha Wimmer
Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 384 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Roger Kaplan

POLITICS, SPECIFICALLY the violent politics of Latin American history, have a significant place in the work of the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa. From the left-wing military junta that took power in Peru in the early 1960's, which looms in the background of *The Time of the Hero* (1963) and *Conversation in a Cathedral* (1969), to the fascistic Trujillo dictatorship that controlled the Dominican Republic from 1930 to 1961, which sits at center stage in *The Feast of the Goat* (2000), the brutal and arbitrary politics of his continent have inspired Vargas Llosa's settings and, more importantly, his plots.

ROGER KAPLAN, *a writer living in New York, is the author of* Conservative Socialism: The Decline of Radicalism and the Triumph of the Left in France.

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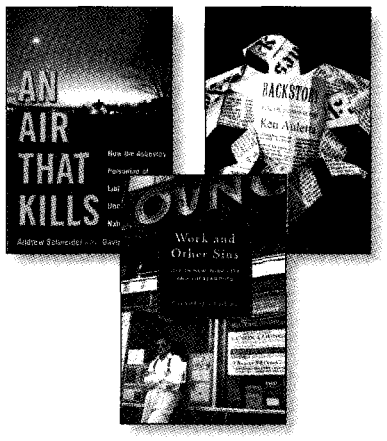

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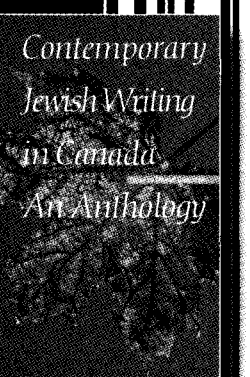

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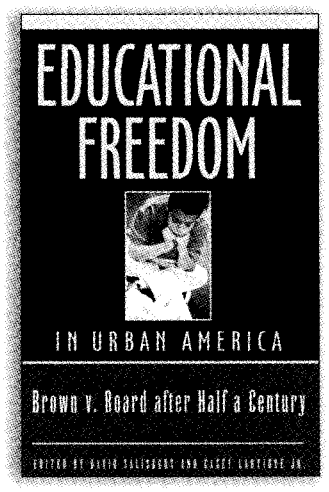

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May 2004, 342 pp.
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Indeed, Vargas Llosa, who was born in 1936, has himself taken an active interest in public affairs. His own political itinerary has taken him from a conventional position on the "anti-imperialist" Left to a keen appreciation of liberal democracy, with a special interest in the free-market economics promoted by his friend and compatriot Hernando de Soto. In 1990, he went so far as to contest the presidency of his country following the unhappy tenure of the last socialist president, Alan Garcia. He lost to the "samurai," Alberto Fujimori, who, after defeating the Maoist terror movement "Shining Path," proceeded to spoil his early success through increasingly authoritarian tendencies and corruption. The convulsions of those years are discussed in Vargas Llosa's novel *Death in the Andes* (1993), and in the nonfiction *A Fish in the Water* (1993) and *Making Waves* (1997).

More so than politics, however, it is history, or more precisely biography, that inspires Vargas Llosa's new novel, *The Way to Paradise*. Specifically, he is concerned with two real-life seekers after paradise: the French painter Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) and Gauguin's maternal grandmother, the socialist and feminist agitator Flora Tristan (1803-1844). In alternating chapters, Vargas Llosa evokes the final days of these two figures as they mount their last assaults on the summits that, as we learn from extended flashbacks, they have separately sought for years. In Vargas Llosa's hands, this interwoven method works nearly as well here as it did in his earlier *The Feast of the Goat*. Creating intimate portraits of his characters over time, he brings home, with an almost stunning familiarity, a set of obsessions with which any reader can identify—even though, in their own lives, the two fanatics who entertained these obsessions seemed bent on cutting themselves off from every form of normal human intercourse.

The Way to Paradise addresses, in fact, two disparate varieties of fanaticism, the one artistic, the other political. In Gauguin, Vargas Llosa depicts a creative genius, a man willing to sacrifice everything, including all conventional norms of behavior, to achieve his artistic goal. In the woman known in her own time as "*Madame-la-Colère*" (Lady Anger), he depicts a lover of humanity who abandons husband and family in pursuit of a better world, a new society founded on a "workers' union" that will guarantee justice and ban war (as well as marriage).

Flora Tristan died before the birth of her much more famous grandson, but both grandmother and grandson shared a feminine connection. Flora's mother, we learn from these pages, was a Frenchwoman; her father, a grandee from Arequipa, Peru, which happens to be Vargas Llosa's home town. Although Flora herself would spend her life in France, her daughter Aline and her son-in-law Clovis Gauguin, a republican newspaperman, would flee to Peru when the liberal temper of the July monarchy gave way to repression. Clovis died during the journey, but Aline's Peruvian family treated her and her children with great kindness. Thus, for several years of his childhood, until Aline returned to France, Paul was exposed to an exotic locale—a fact later seized upon by biographers seeking to interpret his eventual sojourn in Tahiti.

Not that the appeal of the exotic is sufficient to explain Gauguin's truly momentous career move at the age of forty, which is when he quit a lucrative career as a stock broker to take up painting. Vargas Llosa's portrait of the inner Gauguin is the novel's most remarkable achievement. This is not the well-known figure of myth who championed the "primitive" as against the bourgeois but a man overflowing with a passion that, whatever outlets it may have found in the extolling of "primitive innocence" or in defiance of "civiliza-

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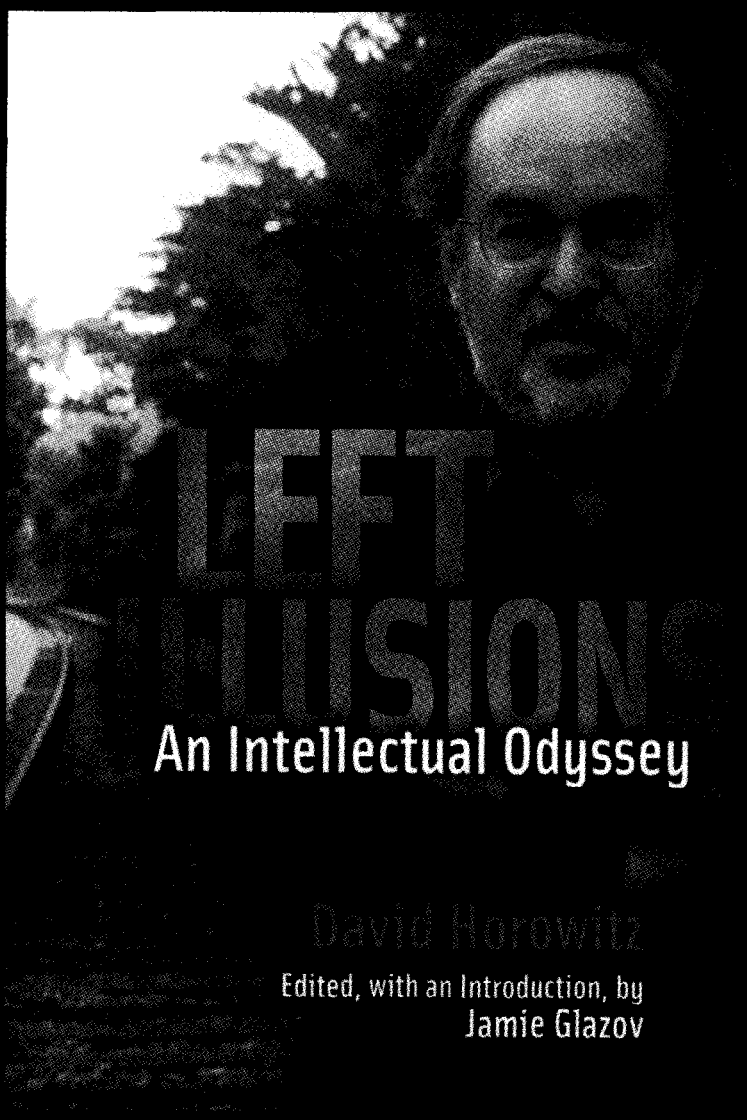

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MY RIGHTEOUS GENTILE

Lord Wedgwood and Other Memories

Gabriella Auspitz Labson

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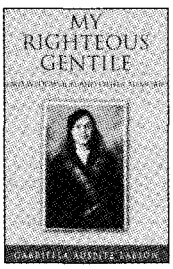
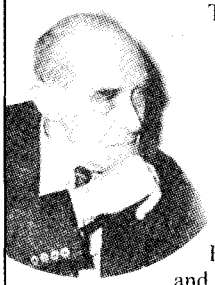


This memoir has two protagonists: Josiah Wedgwood, M.P.,Christian Zionist, and the author herself, whose spirit shines from its pages.

In the 1920's, Wedgwood visited her town in democratic Czechoslovakia to preach Zionism. Gabriella was chosen to present a bouquet of flowers, and, after Munich, she appealed for his help. He sent visas for Britain, saving her life and her brother's.



They met again, in 1941, when Wedgwood came to alert America to the Nazi peril. He feared that Britain would do little to save Hitler's victims; and when the *Struma* sank, Wedgwood, now a peer, stunned the House of Lords with his hope that those responsible would be "hanged high as Haman."

As they both feared, victory came too late. Gabriella's family died at Auschwitz, and she dedicated herself to the survival of the Jewish people, through education, here and in Israel.

Elie Wiesel tells us ***"Read these memoirs and you'll see what good and courageous people have done in those dark years to save the honor of humankind — but why were they so few?"***

tion," was in the end about something much greater and deeper.

As a youth, Gauguin had shipped out in the merchant marine and done military service in the French navy. Prior to settling down with a good job and a good wife, he had had his fill of adventure. The truth, as Vargas Llosa convincingly portrays it, is that his later wanderings, which brought him to Tahiti following periods in Brittany and Arles (where he infamously and tragically quarreled with his friend Vincent Van Gogh), accompanied a quest of fearsome intensity.

That quest was aesthetic, not anthropological or erotic. The lure of the Maori cultures of the South Pacific, with their appreciation of instinct and magic (rendering symbols both vivid and vital) and their absence of inhibitions (encouraging strong contrasts of color and form), was inexorably tied to the slow development of Gauguin's artistic ideas. And the quest succeeded: he reinvented art. It also killed him, as it had to.

Just as Vargas Llosa gives us Gauguin the artist, not the Artist of sentimental legend, so with Flora Tristan he is more interested in the woman than in the Woman's Champion. His portrait of her is sympathetic at every turn; in his telling, for instance, she emerges as less selfish in her behavior toward others than her grandson, and Vargas Llosa even defends her abandonment of her family by reference to her husband's brutality.

Still, there is no doubt that he sees in the political activist a far more delusional character than in the artist. Art, for Vargas Llosa, transcends delusions, and when it is great it transforms them into delusion's opposite: reality most deeply stated. Radical politics exacerbates delusions, manipulates them for the benefit of tyrants and incendiaries.

OTHER THAN biographical circumstance, what is the point of linking these two great stories of obsession? It would seem to be that the very notion of searching for paradise on earth requires certain common and identifiable character traits, no matter what the nature of the paradise being sought. It is fascinating to watch as Vargas Llosa's two characters insist on accomplishing their missions--if they do not usher in an earthly paradise, at least they will die with the bittersweet satisfaction of having caught a glimpse of it. And, such is Vargas Llosa mastery of *his* art, the resulting book is both funny and pathetic, and full of surprises despite its foreordained conclusion. Both the young political firebrand and the middle-aged artist will die miserably, of (evidently) colon cancer in the former case, of syphilis and alcohol in the latter, yet as the characters approach their doom, Vargas Llosa builds up a dramatic momentum that becomes unstoppable.

His literary approach is quite different from that adopted some 80 years ago in *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919), an earlier novelistic treatment of the Gauguin myth by the British writer Somerset Maugham. Maugham undercut the myth by portraying the shockingly ruthless callousness of a man on an artistic mission, an amoralism pierced only by genius. Vargas Llosa, by contrast, tries to get inside the artist's head and heart: he wants to show the pain that paves the way to an imagined paradise. His Gauguin is thus more accessible as a human being than Maugham's Gauguin (aptly called Strickland), whose indifference to the world's opinion is the armor that allows him to keep going even as his body fails him.

The Way to Paradise is a moving and profound meditation on the selfish single-mindedness, verging on madness, that comes with wanting to change the way things are—the way we see things, the way we live. It is a measure of Vargas Llosa's achievement that, rather than feeling either dread or repugnance for his protagonists, we end by feeling both compassion and more than a little awe.

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Down & Out?

The Working Poor: Invisible in America
by David K. Shipler
Knopf. 322 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Leslie Lenkowsky

When welfare reform passed in 1996, critics insisted that the law's sunny assumptions could not survive the next economic downturn: the poor would be thrown into the streets, and public-assistance rolls would shoot upward. But that has not happened. To the contrary, even with the recession and slow recovery of the past three years, the number of people receiving such aid has continued to decline (if at a slower rate). Half as many families are now on welfare as when the law was enacted.

Yet, far from producing a sense of satisfaction with welfare reform, this accomplishment has led to new criticisms by those who were cool to the policy in the first place. They argue, with some justice, that we still have not figured out how to address the deep-seated problems, like substance abuse and mental illness, that leave many families unable to support themselves. More fundamentally, they insist that most of those exiting the welfare rolls are not, in fact, better off: they have just wound up taking dead-end jobs that keep them in poverty and do nothing to reduce their economic vulnerability.

David K. Shipler's *The Working Poor* does not focus on former welfare recipients, but it does lend support to this view of today's labor market. Through a series of sensitive, sometimes heart-rending portraits, Shipler (a former *New York Times* reporter and a winner of the Pulitzer Prize) brings to life the men and women in the U.S. who work hard in low-paying jobs. To his mind, holes in our social "safety net" are a major element in the difficulties faced by these "invisible" Americans; whether his own account bears this out is another matter.

Drawing on years of reporting and research, Shipler details the variety of ways in which the working poor fall on hard times. Some make unwise financial choices, winding up saddled with payments that consume their meager incomes, or they are taken advantage of by employers or unscrupulous lenders. Others work in parts of the economy where hours are long and erratic, layoffs commonplace, and competition keen—factors that put a damper on wages and on benefits like health insurance. Shipler's account of Caroline Payne, a New Hampshire woman who went through a dizzying array of jobs for 25 years, with her earnings rising only from $6 to $6.80 an hour, shows not just the challenges the working poor face in getting ahead but also their admirable willingness to keep trying.

The workplace itself presents another set of obstacles. Whether through a lack of skills or of habits like punctuality and diligence, or because of problems created by their financially precarious existence, the working poor have a difficult time getting and keeping jobs. Their bleak prospects improve only when the economy is growing and employers are hiring in greater numbers.

Immigrants, who now make up half of the growth in the labor force, are a sizable component of the "invisible" poor. For anyone who might have thought sweatshops belonged to a bygone era, Shipler offers a tour of the Los Angeles garment industry, where newcomers from Latin America and Asia earn a pittance for long days stitching designer clothing. Their situation does not seem bad, however, compared to that of the farm workers whom Shipler finds in North Carolina,

Leslie Lenkowsky *is professor of public affairs and philanthropic studies at Indiana University.*

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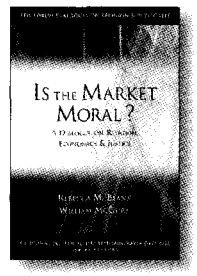

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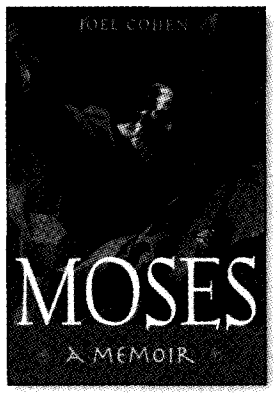

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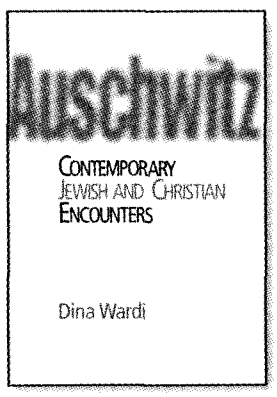

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most of them illegal immigrants. Crowded into dilapidated quarters, traveling frequently to keep up with the growing season, paid only for what they can pick or pack, they live with the threat and constant uncertainty posed by bad harvests and the prospect of deportation.

As for the children of the working poor, they suffer a range of problems. They are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse, Shipler reports, which makes it harder for them to establish families of their own and also induces a sense of helplessness in other aspects of their lives. Because of poor nutrition, they are more likely to grow up with mental and physical disabilities. On top of all this, they generally attend schools that are underfinanced and poorly staffed, plagued by what Shipler calls "corrosive relationships" between parents and teachers.

To Shipler's credit, he does not use poverty as an all-purpose explanation for the fate of these families. He understands that the people whose lives he chronicles have choices and often use them badly. Still, he is convinced that the key fact about the working poor is their lack of income, which gives them and their children less room for error in everything they do. "Without the buffers of family affluence, achievement, and ambition," he writes, "a child is dangerously exposed."

Shipler looks to government for help in reducing, if not eliminating, this risk. Public policy could help the working poor in a variety of ways, he believes, if only the country were to become less "ambivalent" about meeting their needs. Increases in the minimum wage, a more generous Earned Income Tax Credit, improved food, housing, and medical benefits—all are planks in his platform. Spending more on schools and creating better vocational training programs also win his endorsement, as do more "comprehensive" and "professional" services to assist parents in raising their children.

THE TROUBLE with these programs is not just that they have problems of their own—corruption, perverse incentives, job destruction—to which Shipler pays scant attention. Rather, it is that, by his own account, programs focused on improving the material circumstances of the working poor do not appear to be a crucial factor in the lives of those people who do manage to work their way out of poverty.

Shipler writes, for instance, about Leary Brock, a rape victim, drug addict, high-school dropout, and single parent who seemed destined for a lifetime of poverty. Following an arrest, however, she was given the chance to participate in a job-training program instead of going to jail. Run by a Washington, D.C. charity founded by a Catholic priest, the program emphasized not just skills but attitudes and habits; it was a serious initiation into the cultural demands of the American workplace. In due course, Brock became a successful employee at a Fortune 500 company, earning a respectable wage and winning recognition for her accomplishments.

Dealing with adversity was also much easier for those of Shipler's subjects who could turn to strong families. Indeed, it is hard to imagine coping with more travails than those of Tom and Kara King, whose lives were saddled by alcoholism, epilepsy, injuries, failed prior marriages, unemployment, low wages, and, ultimately, cancer that claimed Kara's life at thirty-three. Yet, through it all, they stayed together, eventually earning a decent income and raising children who were college-bound. Tom and Kara "weren't looking for handouts," Shipler writes. They "thought the responsibility for their welfare rested not with the welfare system but with themselves."

That conviction is precisely what welfare reform and other new initiatives emphasizing self-support have been designed to encourage. By all indications, they are having a

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profound cultural effect. Not only have we seen a big drop in welfare caseloads, but during the recent recession, the poverty rate grew considerably more slowly than expected. Less than 3 percent of those who worked full-time were poor.

Shipler has given us a vivid portrait of the struggle of the working poor to acquire steady, decently paid employment. But he is mistaken to suggest that government has not helped them on the road to middle-class security. Since the mid-1990's, ambitious (and often costly) social policies favoring work over welfare and bolstering family ties have begun to transform how we think of public assistance for the working poor. These may not be the programs that Shipler and his political allies have in mind, and there is still much more that government could do. But the national statistics, like many of the stories poignantly recounted in this book, leave little doubt that we have been moving in the right direction.

In Search of Monsters?

Surprise, Security, and the American Experience
by John Lewis Gaddis
Harvard. 150 pp. $18.95

Reviewed by
Max Boot

A great many books analyzing the recent shifts in American foreign policy have appeared since September 11, 2001. Most are harshly critical of President Bush and all his works. Their tenor can be judged by some of their titles: *Rogue Nation*, *The Bubble of American Supremacy*, *The Sorrows of Empire*, *Superpower Syndrome*. The more scabrous among them do not hesitate to compare George W. Bush to Adolf Hitler and America to Nazi Germany. And that is to say nothing of the books, which have become bestsellers in Europe, claiming that the CIA (or was it the Mossad?) was actually behind the 9/11 attacks. In response, some on the Right have produced equally histrionic screeds, like Ann Coulter's *Treason: Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terrorism* and Sean Hannity's *Deliver Us From Evil: Defeating Terrorism, Despotism and Liberalism*—books that, in essence, accuse Bush's critics of being fifth columnists.

It is a relief, therefore, to pick up *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, a sober attempt to analyze Bush's foreign policy in historical context and without partisan rancor. Its author is John Lewis Gaddis, our most eminent historian of the cold war, who taught for many years at Ohio University and now holds the Robert A. Lovett chair in military and naval history at Yale.

Gaddis first rose to prominence with the publication in 1972 of *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*, which rejected revisionist attempts to pin the blame for that conflict on the U.S. To Gaddis, the Soviet Union was at least equally responsible. Then, following the release in the 1990's of new documents from the Soviet archives, Gaddis revised this position, concluding that Stalin was solely responsible for the post-World War II break with the West. He also disavowed his earlier view that the cold war was largely governed by geopolitical rivalries. His 1997 book *We Now Know* argued that Communist ideology had played a bigger role than realpolitik in motivating Soviet conduct.

Though he has long outraged New Left historians, Gaddis is

Max Boot *is Olin senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, a contributing editor to the* Weekly Standard, *and a weekly columnist for the* Los Angeles Times.

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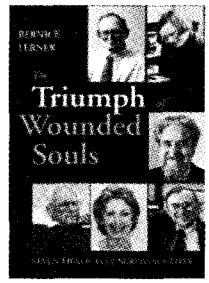

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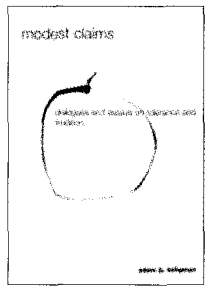

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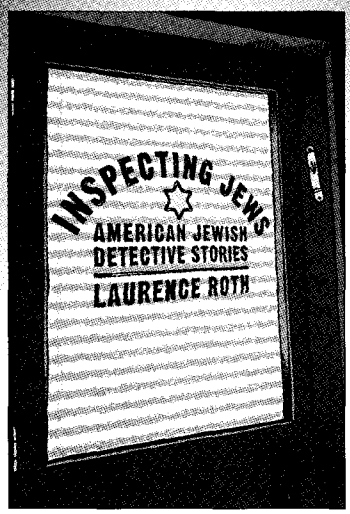

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hardly known as a conservative. His reputation is that of a moderately liberal scholar—which makes the assessment of Bush's foreign policy that he offers in this slender volume all the more interesting and all the more likely to discomfit the administration's critics.

IN GADDIS'S view, there have been three big shifts in the long history of U.S. foreign policy, each one occasioned by a surprise attack on American soil. The first, he argues, happened after the British sacked Washington on August 24, 1814. This sudden exposure of American vulnerability led John Quincy Adams, first as Secretary of State, then as President, to redefine the U.S. approach to the world.

In Gaddis's telling, the themes invoked by Adams sound strikingly modern: "preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony." He was "keenly aware of the fact that the United States had vast borders to defend," Gaddis writes, "but only limited means with which to defend them." Adams therefore decided that the U.S. had to gobble up as much border territory as possible to ensure against attack by neighboring states or marauding Indians.

This justification for preemptive annexation was eagerly taken up by Adams's successors. James Polk added Texas and the southwestern territories to the United States. William McKinley went even further afield by grabbing the Philippines, for fear that if the U.S. did not seize the islands, either Germany or Japan would. Similar motives led a succession of Presidents to send armed forces to the Caribbean and Central America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In all these interventions, the U.S. was acting unilaterally, wanting to avoid entanglements in Europe's alliance system. The U.S. was also attempting to establish its hegemony not only in North America but in the whole Western hemisphere—a policy codified in the Monroe Doctrine (developed by John Quincy Adams), which told European imperialists to keep out of the New World. During much of the 19th century, the U.S. did not have the power to back up its words, but by 1895 Secretary of State James Olney could proclaim with some justification, "Today, the United States is practically sovereign on this continent."

GADDIS BELIEVES that, aside from a brief burst of Wilsonianism, Adams's vision dominated U.S. foreign policy until the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Adams had been able to limit the U.S. pursuit of hegemony to the Western hemisphere because of the security buffer provided by the Pacific and the Atlantic. He declared that America "goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy." But what if those monsters came here?

The attack on Pearl Harbor revealed that Americans no longer had the luxury of (as Gaddis puts it) "geographical separation from everyone else who might threaten them." FDR decided that, in order to ensure its security, America now had to be predominant in the whole world. But he did not think the U.S. could achieve this ambitious goal through the old policies of preemption and unilateralism.

Roosevelt sought global hegemony with the consent of other nations. He pledged the U.S. to work through the United Nations in the postwar world. His successors erected NATO, the Bretton Woods system, and similar institutions to bring other states into an American-led world order. An important corollary of this policy, Gaddis writes, was to avoid using preemptive force under most circumstances, because this could shatter the unity of the Western alliance and cost the U.S. the moral high ground. Instead of preempting the USSR, the U.S. deterred it.

Gaddis argues that this multilateral system won the cold war, but

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that 9/11 exposed its inadequacies. It is unlikely, he writes, "that diplomacy or deterrence could have prevented the September 11th attacks." Realizing this, President Bush has initiated the third major shift in U.S. foreign policy by returning to the hallmarks of John Quincy Adams: preemption, hegemony, and unilateralism.

Gaddis offers a good deal of praise for the National Security Strategy released in September 2002 and for the President who produced it. September 11, he writes, provoked "one of the most surprising transformations of an underrated national leader since Prince Hal became Henry V." He credits the National Security Strategy for being "more forceful, more carefully crafted, and—unexpectedly—more multilateral" than its Clinton-era predecessor.

Gaddis is fairly scathing about the Clinton administration in general. He compares Bill Clinton with Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge, "for those Presidents of the 1920's had also allowed an illusion of safety to produce a laissez-faire foreign and national-security policy." He argues that Bush has come up with an alternative approach—essentially, preemptive attacks against terrorists and states that harbor them, combined with a determination to spread democracy—that is more attuned to the threats we face today.

But Gaddis is hardly a publicist for the White House. At the same time that he displays broad sympathy with the President's grand strategy, he expresses disquiet about how it has been implemented. Citing Fareed Zakaria's book, *Illiberal Democracy*, he worries that spreading democracy might not be a magic elixir for America's problems in all cases. Moreover, he frets that the administration has alarmed too many people around the world with its talk of preemption and the "axis of evil," and its willingness to invade Iraq without the blessing of the UN. He closes this book with a plea for what is essentially a "kinder, gentler" Bush Doctrine—one that, like the "American system of cold-war alliances," would allow "the United States to wield power while minimizing arrogance."

Gaddis is a graceful writer, and he has sprinkled provocative insights throughout the 150 pages of this inelegantly titled book, which grew out of a series of lectures at the New York Public Library. Its brevity is both an advantage and a disadvantage—an advantage because it makes

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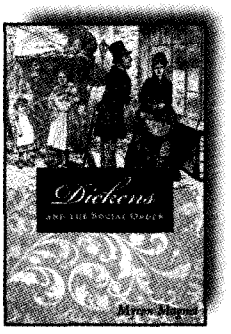

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for an easy read, a disadvantage because it does not allow him to flesh out and defend his ideas.

Reading *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, I often wanted to ask Gaddis: "But what about . . . ?" For instance, did not the policies he attributes to John Quincy Adams—preemption, unilateralism, hegemony—predate the British attack on Washington? Thomas Jefferson, after all, completed the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. If that was not an example of a preemptive action designed to expand American hegemony, it is hard to know what is. And the doctrine of unilateralism was first enunciated not by Adams but by Washington and Jefferson—a fact that Gaddis acknowledges, though he thinks that Washington may have been influenced by an essay Adams wrote in 1793. Even if that is the case, it suggests that the burning of the Capitol and the White House in 1814 was not quite as pivotal as Gaddis makes it out to be.

I also found myself wishing for more explanation in his closing chapters. Sure, it would be nice to have multilateral consent for an aggressive, American-led policy of fighting terrorists and weapons of mass destruction. But how do we get it? Gaddis offers scant guidance beyond an injunction to avoid "the sin of pride." This begs all of the really difficult questions: Is the United Nations capable of upholding international order? Can we keep together cold-war alliances to tackle post-cold-war threats? Do we need to forge new alliances for new challenges? Under what circumstances, if any, is unilateral or preemptive action justified?

These are only quibbles, however, with a fine book. Leaving aside the validity of this or that detail, Gaddis's major contribution is to treat the Bush Doctrine as a set of ideas worthy of scholarly examination rather than as a subject for ritualistic denunciation. He does not denigrate the President as a cowboy or a neo-Nazi, a simpleton or a dupe. Instead, Gaddis suggests that Bush is honestly grappling with the challenges that we confront today and, if he does not always get it right, he is nevertheless coming up with more interesting and ambitious responses than most of his critics.

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Some Sobering Thoughts on Pakistan's Future—and Ours

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The revelation that Pakistani scientists have transmitted knowledge about atomic weapons to Iran and Libya refocuses our attention on this troubled ally. President Pervez Musharraf, a survivor of many assassination attempts, is despised by those who desire to impose a Taliban-type regime on the nation. If a military junta armed with nuclear weapons and sympathetic to radical Islamists took over, the outcome could be disastrous.

President Musharraf's most implacable enemies are fundamentalist Islamic groups whose members are found in parliament, the army, the intelligence services (SIS), the intelligentsia, and government. Indeed, the Pakistani army and SIS were instrumental in the Taliban's coming to power in Afghanistan.

The hostility toward President Musharraf stems from his cooperation with the United States and his policies toward India and the Kashmir region. His enemies hope to undermine him by fanning the flames of dissatisfaction. **We can help Pakistan achieve stability by discouraging policies that create unrest and encouraging policies that will benefit the struggling population.**

Some policies should be immediately dropped, including the president's well-intentioned land reform program. Although half of Pakistan's population is engaged in rudimentary agriculture, in country after country, government redistribution of private property has failed.

The government ought to also abandon attempts to impose Urdu as the official language. Only 8 percent of Pakistanis were Urdu speakers in 2003, with surveys indicating that more than half the population prefers to have their children taught in English because it is the lingua franca of the government and the elite. Pakistan should take a lesson from India, which has shown that allowing linguistic groups greater autonomy creates a stake for these provinces to stay within the union.

The government also needs to raise the level of literacy. Less than half the population is currently literate, in part due to policies that favor higher education at the expense of wider availability of elementary education. A better-educated public would make Pakistan much more attractive for direct foreign investment—thus bettering the lives of ordinary citizens.

The United States must encourage Pakistan to divert a greater portion of its GNP toward elementary and secondary education for women. Among many benefits, educated women tend to have fewer children and those children are healthier and attain higher levels of education than do children of uneducated women.

Poor economic prospects have forced university and high school graduates to migrate to the gulf countries, Western Europe, and the United States. That trend must be slowed and eventually reversed. Economic prospects at home would improve if Pakistan liberalized its economy. The United States can help by extending its program that provides credit and business development services to micro-entrepreneurs to Pakistan.

Lastly, Pakistan and other countries, including the United States, must convince Saudi Arabia to support secular schools instead of funding radical Islamic schools—these madrassas have been hotbeds for terrorism.

Reform and stability will not come easily. But **we must help President Musharraf create a more open economy, a freer political system, a broader educational system, and greater respect for provincial authority.** If he does not succeed, we will likely face very unpleasant consequences.

—Guity Nashat

Guity Nashat is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and an associate professor of history at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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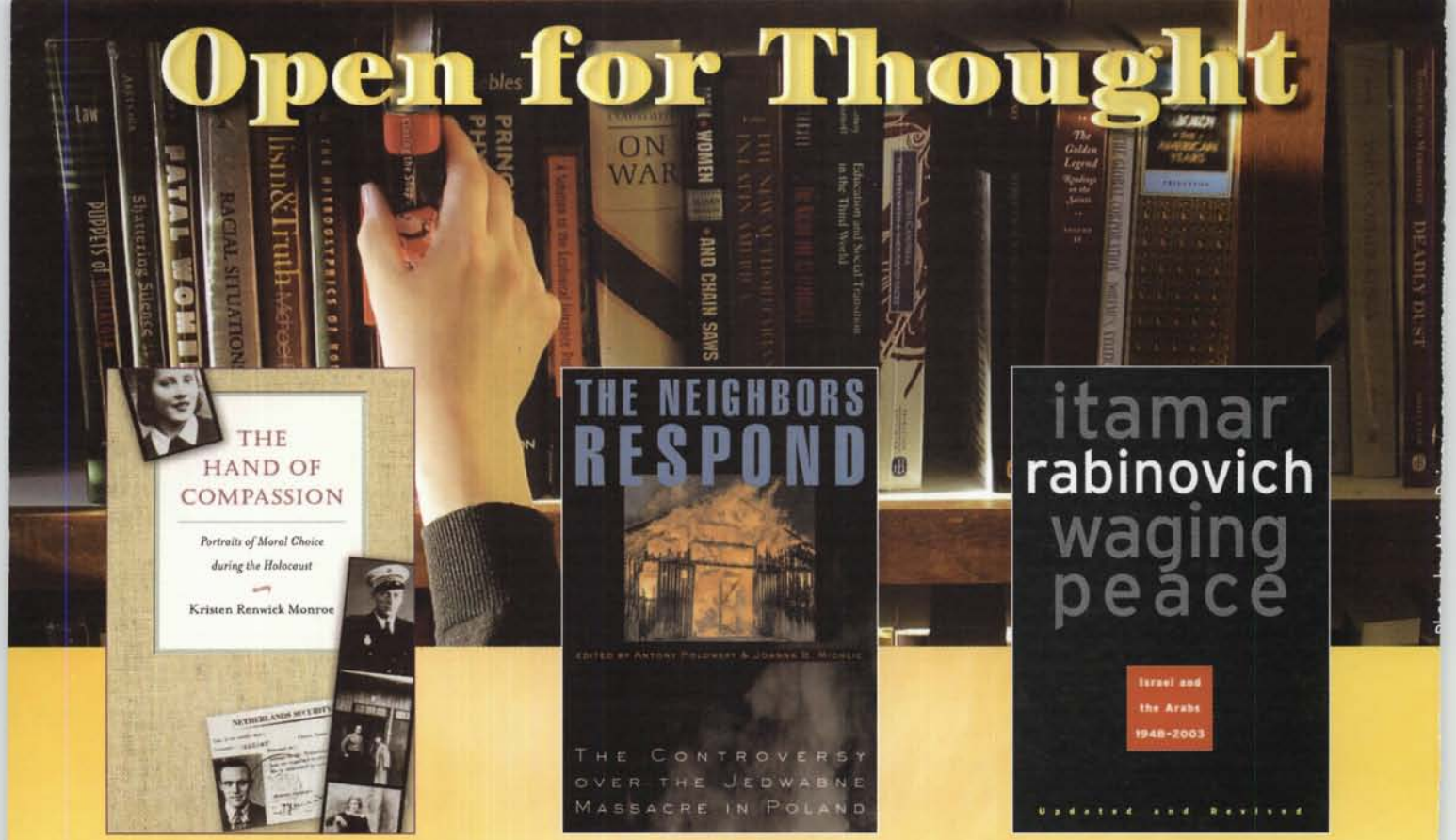
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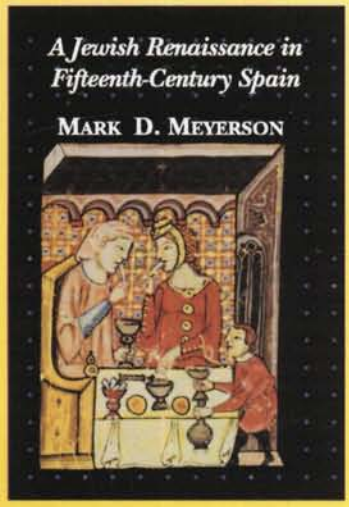

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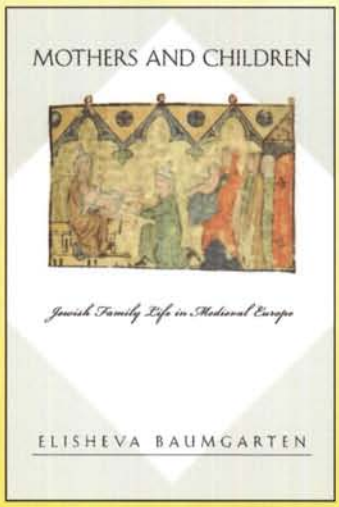

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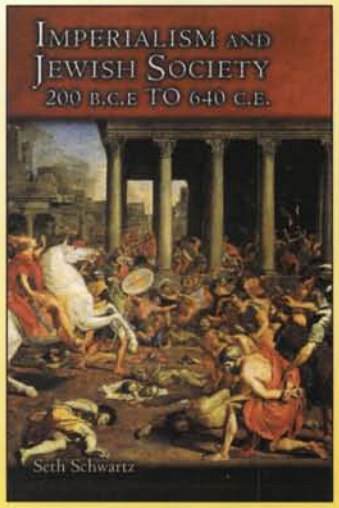

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